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Delawar, Sadaf

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Chronicling the Flows of the Afghan Refugee Crises: A Historical Approach

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
Requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Global Studies

by

Sadaf Delawar

Committee in charge:

Professor Alison Brysk

Professor Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky

Professor Anshu Malhotra

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The thesis of Sadaf Delawar is approved.

Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky

Anshu Malhotra

Alison Brysk, Committee Chair

December 2022

ABSTRACT

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by

Sadaf Delawar

Afghanistan's development has been the antithesis of progress. A nation whose borders were forged by the great powers of its time, Great Britain and Russia, without regard for the intricacies of the country. Decades of internal ethnic and religious conflict stemmed from the arbitrary construction of its borders and was furthered by political chaos and dynastic rivalries, which built a fragile state dependent on foreign aid and resources. The state's vulnerabilities encouraged foreign influence and embittered tensions between rural people absent from the nation's political future. The historical approach of this thesis contextualizes the ongoing and cyclical disruptions in the socio-political evolution of Afghanistan. Evaluating the most volatile periods of Afghanistan's contemporary history, beginning with the invasion of the Soviet Union to the most recent withdrawal of the United States, reveals the nearly 50 years of chaos and destruction in Afghanistan. These struggles and histories deconstruct the baseline of Afghanistan's instability. The deprave conditions of warfare have pushed millions of Afghans out of Afghanistan, with each invasion and cycle of political upheaval contributing to a pattern of displacement. Yet, the apparent pattern of Afghan departure at the height of each period of instability has not garnered the proper response and support from the international refugee system or its donor states, of which the United States is the most significant.

History and data are the primary methodological tools of this thesis. History provides context, and data provides insights demonstrating the gaps in the international refugee system. The gaps stem from inappropriate responses, lack of funding and preparation in foreshadowing future refugee crises, poor infrastructure, low donor state support, and general ignorance by influential states. These factors contribute to the ongoing Afghan refugee crisis, revealing the issue's depth and the magnitude of international political reformation required to rectify and aid the millions of Afghan refugees hoping for a better future.

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I. Introduction

Purpose

As the second largest refugee population in the world, Afghans have faced decades of refugeehood and insecurity. Many internally displaced people result from war and invasions, resulting in people seeking resources and protection in larger cities. Meanwhile, others have pushed further into nearby bordering countries known as front-line states, Pakistan and Iran. However, as decades of conflict have ebbed and flowed, the Afghan refugee crisis has contributed to a protracted displacement affecting front-line states' generosity. As a result, this has led to many destructive policies designed to repatriate Afghans forcefully. Nonetheless, the forty-seven years and counting of instability, insecurity, and weak state structure has contributed to Afghanistan's ongoing refugee flows and established a cyclical displacement pattern that has disrupted the development of the Afghan state and affected its relationship with the international community.

Therefore, it is critical to examine the formation of Afghanistan from its inception as a state constructed by British and Russian interests and its subsequent state structure as a project of imperialists influenced by aid and military support. These relationships and ties are essential features of insecurity in each period of ethnic, cultural, and religious conflicts, which exposed Afghanistan's most critical issues in the midst of changing leadership. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the roots of instability that led to millions of Afghans' departure over the last few decades, including that of my own family.

Positionality

Truly impactful research begins from a place of personal connection. While many researchers are privileged enough to explore issues and write from a place of curiosity or sympathy, my positionality is not the same. I do not have the privilege to research and write and pursue academic pursuits for the sake of theoretical knowledge. Instead, my research and interests are rooted in my family's genealogy and my traumas, which I explore to understand better and perhaps find solace in the form of catharsis. However, knowing this means that I have limits in my research, which include but are not limited to being short-sighted, biased, and overly critical in the view of others. However, my personal story and biases have fueled this research; despite the hardships I have endured in the last two years and many setbacks, my interests and ties to this work have motivated my work and inspired me to finish.

My family's life-threatening journey escaping the Taliban has been at the center of my childhood. My family left Kunduz in the fall of 1998 after my uncle was imprisoned for a month by the Taliban. On the night of my uncle's release, my family, including my uncle, mother, my two siblings, my aunt, and grandmother, packed into his car, and we drove to Kabul, paid a smuggler, and were able to flee to Peshawar, Pakistan. The journey to Pakistan involved dangerous terrain, including taking three small children through the Sheba mountains of Afghanistan, with heights reaching 5,000-6,200 meters, while enduring harsh winter climates. Our family's only point of privilege was the savings my mother's side of the family had before the Taliban takeover. The small savings allowed my family to rent a place in Pakistan and forego the refugee camps in Peshawar.

Moreover, my other uncles had left earlier in 1997 and had established themselves abroad in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. As a result, with my uncles' aid, we obtained passports and flew

to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where we remained for almost a year. Following this, my nuclear family went to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and remained there for about four years before applying for asylum in the United States in 2003. Moving to the United States post-9/11 was difficult because headlines about Afghanistan were the focal point of every news network. News coverage of the War on Terror and the discomfort and hostile treatment from teachers and classmates splintered my identity. Images of bombs dropping, people fleeing, blood-soaked streets, and catastrophic explosions that leveled entire neighborhoods were part of my most formative memories. In an attempt to disassociate from war, terror, and death, I distanced myself from everything Afghan.

Through an extensive unlearning and de-conditioning process, I explored the intricacies of the Afghan identity, culture, and history. The resilience of my fellow country members in enduring decades of war is one source of inspiration for my research. Furthermore, to educate myself and others on the specific and unique issues that Afghan refugees face, I hope to connect the Afghan-American diaspora to the ongoing Afghan refugee crisis to inspire greater political advocacy. Lastly, I aspire to use this research to remind the diaspora of the importance of unity, education, and community.

Research Question

In this context, to better navigate through the centuries of a complex and detailed history that has contributed to the cyclical pattern of instability and Afghan displacement, the research must focus on a set of questions this thesis asks, “Why have Afghans consistently remained one of the largest refugee populations in the world? And what factors have contributed to the ongoing Afghan refugee crisis?”

Thesis

Afghans have remained one of the largest refugee populations in the world due to their geography, history, cultural heterogeneity, and foreign interests. These factors have contributed to the ongoing refugee crisis as each era post the invasion of the Soviet Union revealed the gaps within the Afghan state infrastructure. Its geography presented opportunities to its neighbors and Western nations to establish military footholds in the country to provide a strategic military position to observe Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Furthermore, the historical construction of Afghan statehood has been chaotic and marred by familial betrayal and disruption within family lines, exposing the monarchy as weak and ineffective. These state weaknesses and a litany of ethnic groups vying for state power have opened the door for additional foreign invasions and influence to aid and abet one ethnic group over another, heightening tensions and contributing to insecurity. These issues during multi-generational wars have led to a pattern of displacement and the protracted refugee status of Afghans in Iran, Pakistan, and beyond.

Methodology

The basis of this thesis is founded upon a historical examination of Afghanistan from 1901 to 2021. Afghanistan's history is critical to its future development. By utilizing Afghan history, I examine the gaps present in the state structure from the Afghan state construction to the successive governments centralizing and maintaining power in Kabul. That alone disenfranchised large portions of Afghanistan, especially its largest ethnic group, the Pashtuns. Additionally, by examining Afghanistan's history and geography, the roots of Afghan statehood as a project of imperial interests become clear. This project was supported by financial aid and military power from global institutions that bolstered the power of Kabul at the expense of

Afghanistan's largely rural, subsistence-based farming communities. These communities often were isolated and distanced from Kabul's historical development and progress.

I also examine national and international data databases on the number of refugees that have evacuated each year after the Soviet Union invasion. Additionally, deeper data analysis reveals the extent of aid in dollars provided, the number of aerial bombs dropped, drone strikes conducted, and other hard and soft military power directed toward Afghanistan. Other pertinent data included the aid provided by specific countries, like the United States, in responding to the refugee crisis of Afghans. The caveat to examining these sources is that it is primarily western, with some sources coming from international agencies. Specifically analyzing data and statistics from the United Nations, UNHCR, the World Bank, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and the International Organizations of Migration (IOM). Furthermore, data made publicly available by the United States State Department, the White House, and the U.S. military have been essential for this thesis. News sources, including the New York Times, the Washington Post, The Associated Press, and Al-Jazeera, have helped contextualize other available data.

Lastly, because the methodology for this thesis shifted several times, I could not weave ethnographic observation into my research. However, this method was necessary for my understanding and development. As a result, I initially traveled and spent three months in Istanbul, Turkey seeking to interview and examine the conditions of refugees in a large refugee-hosting nation. However, this proved difficult as IRB conditions could not be met within the timeline of my stay in the fall of 2021. Nonetheless, I observed neighborhoods such as Zeytinburnu on the European side of Istanbul, which had a sizeable Afghan population, many of whom were undocumented and working in the area but living in one of the refugee camps

located two hours away. These were mainly young men sent by their families to work to provide for the rest. Many of the hospitals in the area were private, often not requiring paperwork or identification cards, just cash.

Additionally, while Istanbul is known for its mosques and Islamic centers, the neighborhood did not have any of these resources within walking distance. For example, public transportation was limited. Also, the area was entirely working-class, with young children selling socks, panhandling, and/or offering small services like shining shoes or cleaning cars; conditions of poverty were apparent as many businesses struggled to stay open. These conditions were in addition to the economic crisis of Turkey due to Covid-19, as September-November 2021 were some of the most volatile for the Turkish Lira. \$1 in September was 8.50 Lira; by the end of November, it drastically changed; at one point, \$1 was 16 Lira, leading to protests and massive outcry.

Overview

Chapter I examines the history of Afghanistan, beginning with the Great Game and then to the early 1900s, the monarch's strength, the dynamics and political struggles of the royal family, and the Anglo-Afghan wars that culminated in Afghanistan's freedom in 1919.¹ The historical progression of Afghanistan is foundational to the ongoing refugee flows. Afghanistan's history also provides an insight into the cyclical waves of insecurity tied to familial disunity, betrayal, and heavy dependence on foreign aid as the support mechanism. These internal conflicts invited external interests in each era and severely hurt the reputation and authority of Kabul. They were then followed by the invasion of the Soviet Union, which contributed to the

¹ Yapp, "School of Oriental and African Studies." 179-183. The Great Game was a period of time (1800-1844) in which Great Britain and Russia bid for political ascendancy in Asia by using spy networks to conduct espionage and influence key regions.

last forty-seven years of ongoing conflict that has led to hundreds of thousands of casualties and millions of refugees.

Chapter II examines refugee flows in the context of the weaknesses of the capital's political leadership. Political party splintering, ongoing dynastic rivalries, and ethnic tensions were some challenges facing Kabul's government. Vulnerabilities in the central government of Afghanistan opened the pathway to dissent around the countryside. Soon, the rivalries and disputes formed radical political views and forged contentious bonds with foreign interests. With each coup and rebellion, Afghanistan's weaknesses are revealed and encourage the aid and support of nearby countries. Soon, a pattern of foreign dependence entrenches itself in each administration's political praxis, leading to the inclusion and invitation of foreign military personnel to restore and sustain order. Chapter II evaluates the impact of the PDPA invitation for the Soviet Union to invade, on the response of rural Afghans and western states, leading to the last forty-seven years of constant invasion and warfare. The disruption of cultural and religious norms and military campaigns alienated the majority of Afghans and displaced millions.

Chapter III examines the international refugee system's responsible parties and resettlement paradigms. Responsible parties include international agencies like the UNHCR and its affiliates in addressing refugee crises. By reviewing the data available, this chapter examines the funding structure of organizations with budgets worth millions of dollars, their ability to handle large-scale displacement, and their responsibility to refugees. Specifically, by looking at each cycle of refugee flows and contextualizing the response of the most critical agencies, this chapter assigns responsibility to the UNHCR, NGOs, and donors. Specifically, donors like the EU and the United States are essential pieces of the puzzle, as their funding and support enable these agencies to carry out their duties. These states and their influence also shape the policies

and prioritize the crises most relevant to the foreign policy interests of the EU and the United States. As a result, this chapter explores the connection between the international community and refugee agencies concerning their mission and duties set forth by the 1957 U.N. Convention on Refugees and donor states.

Chapter IV examines the last Afghan refugee crisis and its aftermath. The previous Afghan refugee crisis refers to the withdrawal of American forces on August 30, 2021, culminating in a Taliban victory. The Taliban were advancing and taking Kabul in less than a week, inciting panic amongst women and minorities. These issues resulted in the evacuation of close to 200,000 people from Afghanistan to nearby frontline states, Europe, and the United States. Those who came to the United States had to navigate through a rigid immigration system, with many having to wait in secondary countries like Qatar, Macedonia, etc., to be vetted before coming to the United States.

Additionally, this chapter examines the U.S. immigration system under the Trump presidency and early Biden presidency, which featured budget and employee cuts. These issues contributed to a system malfunction and have affected the reception of refugees in the United States. Ultimately, this chapter provides a window into the journeys of Afghans who have endured years of instability, harrowing refugee journeys in their departure, their interactions with refugee agencies, and their resettlement process in destination countries. Lastly, the chapter examines data from the top refugee-receiving states and the resources available to families and vulnerable people. The long wait periods, transit journeys, insufficient resources, and fragile immigration status of Afghan refugees reveal the extent of support incoming refugees need.

I – Historical Background

Introduction

Marred by foreign influence, Afghanistan's history and complicated ties reveal internal upheavals rooted in its inception. Beginning with its border construction, Russia and Great Britain convened to structure the borders of Afghanistan in a ploy to gain control over central Asia, a contest known as the "Great Game."² This contest contributed to the formation of Afghanistan as a state whose borders integrated an array of ethnic groups with differing values, cultures, and languages. These features contributed to the project of Afghan statehood and became the precursors for centuries of instability and foreign intervention. In the 19th century, Afghanistan faced brutal civil wars, foreign interventions, insurrections, and state violence. With two major Anglo-Afghan wars (1839-1842) and (1878-1880) led by powerful families, Afghanistan's power sources emanated from lineage and ethnic nationalism. For example, Dost Muhammad led the initial Anglo-Afghan war and lost his throne. Despite the loss, his reputation and line inspired the masses; thus, he returned to lead Afghanistan for an additional twenty years, uniting the country under the banner of his family name.³

In the second Anglo-Afghan War, another influential leader with strong ethnic ties, Abdur Rahman, known as the Iron Amir, led the crusade against the British.⁴ In his endeavors, he centralized power in Kabul and presented Afghanistan as a powerful nation. Abdur Rahman's rule established a baseline of stability for Afghanistan's future governments to aspire towards, centered around his family name and ethnic connections. Therefore, with Abdur Rahman's death

² Dalrymple, William, *Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013). The Great Game was an imperial competition, espionage, and conquest that engaged Britain and Russia until the collapse of their respective Asian empires. 94

³ Barfield, Thomas, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010). (p. 110)

⁴ Amir- known in the Arabic language as "commander" or "prince" an Amir, is a ruler who is a military commander, governor of a province, or a high military official. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/emir>

in 1901, Afghanistan's political balance would falter. Subsequent leaders and governments would result in violent overthrows and insecurity, establishing a precedent for the remainder of the century.⁵

Afghanistan's periods of war tied their struggles against enemies ranging from Great Britain to the United States, each enemy presenting its challenges while invoking the importance of ethnic and religious communities as forces of resistance. The patterns rooted in community resistance and bonds formed from lineages and ethnic lines define nearly every period of Afghan history. The most critical periods to examine in the context of the ongoing refugee flows in Afghanistan from 1901-1973, 1973-1999- 2000-2015, and 2015-2022. These four periods are critical to understanding Afghan state development to provide a holistic view of its core problems leading to the mass exodus of millions of refugees. The first period examines the struggles of Afghan state-building and types of leadership, and the latter three discuss the height of Afghanistan's wars with external and internal forces resulting in millions of casualties and persistent insecurity.

1901- 1973- The Afghan System

Abdur Rahman's death in 1901 led to a peaceful transition of power to his son Habibullah. Habibullah consolidated power without much opposition because his connection to the amir-ship was strong; his father, after all, was "God's agent on Earth," and his legacy of fear was still present in the hearts of Afghans.⁶ While Habibullah's reign was a mere shadow of the strength and cunning of his father, his primary contribution to Afghanistan's historical trajectory was the reintroduction of exiles from his father's era. Because during Amir Abdur Rahman's

⁵ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. 164

⁶ Barfield. 174

time, he exiled many dissidents and opponents to his power, imprisoning those who were against his regime. He wielded this power by creating an authoritarian police state that monitored the people and rewarded those who allied with the government by giving them land and political influence.⁷ Habibullah's decision to release these dissidents and welcome back exiles undid many of his father's security precautions, opening the door to political strife.⁸ The exiles, having lived in other countries and experiencing different circumstances than those that had stayed within the country, were ready to project their ideologies into Afghanistan.

During Abdur Rahman's time, Britain offered the Amir large subsidies and the right to rule without British occupation in exchange for influence over Afghan foreign interests and respect for British power in India. Establishing such a relationship would inform Afghanistan's path, as each succeeding ruler aspired to rule independently while taking military aid, financial assistance, and subsidies from British, Russian, and American powers. Thus, Habibullah initially defied the relationship set forth by his father and disregarded British input while encouraging a holy war against their influence. Later, he reversed this position by asking for British aid. However, Habibullah's reign was short; his brother Nasrullah came to power with his early death. Nasrullah, the incoming amir, had the support of his nephews, all but Amanullah, who declared his uncle a traitor and led a civil war against him that led to a win for the nationalists loyal to Amanullah.⁹

Amanullah took the throne in April 1919 and proclaimed Afghanistan's independence from Britain.¹⁰ Some historical accounts define the early 1900s as the beginning of Afghan state

⁷ Barfield. 147

⁸ Barfield. 175-6

⁹ Barfield. 181

¹⁰ Crews, *Afghan Modern the History of a Global Nation*. 176

independence; others recognize this date as the beginning of the Third Anglo-Afghan War, which contributed to the official declaration of independence, via the Treaty of Rawalpindi, in August 1919. This treaty formally recognized the freedom of the Afghan state.¹¹ By gaining formal independence for Afghanistan, King Amanullah's rule in the subsequent years would prove to be many things; it would be nationalistic and tyrannical but far more progressive than ever before. One of the critical points of weakness within the construction of Afghan statehood was overcoming its fragile economic base and strict social norms. Due to Afghanistan's reliance on foreign aid and subsistence-based economy, the economic and social infrastructure was nonexistent. With few institutions to provide financial security, such as banking, trade, and other opportunities, the state suffered. Furthermore, Afghanistan's many ethnic groups and religious sects harbored a range of religious interpretations and practices while socially separated. As a result, low economic opportunities and limited social ties were crucial factors that fed into the rise of Islamic extremism.¹²

King Amanullah's reign would continue exacerbating the poor economic and social infrastructure. First, the heavy taxation policies aimed at farmers and rural areas enraged many communities because Afghanistan struggled financially due to its subsistence-based economy. Next, Amanullah's world trip inspired social changes that disturbed the Pashtunwali, or code of ethics, of the largest and most influential ethnic group, the Pashtuns. The Pashtun tribes were more rural and secluded, with a stricter interpretation of Islam. As a result, King Amanullah's levying of taxes and secularized ideals further alienated the largest ethnic population of

¹¹ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. 181

¹² Barfield. 190-191

Afghanistan.¹³ In comparison, most of these policies and reforms emanated from Kabul and the central government; their targets were rural, average Afghans.

The widespread conditions of poverty led to resistance, including the Khost Rebellion of 1924 forced the King to retreat and reveal his government's weaknesses.¹⁴ The gaps in governance and security were apparent, and he attempted to quell the Eastern Pashtun region's concerns by withdrawing from his declarations of social reforms, primarily those dealing with the treatment of women, taxation, and conscription. King Amanullah attempted vast reforms during his time; in addition to tax, he tried to loosen strict social norms rooted in more conservative interpretations of Islam. As a result, he encouraged women's education, unveiled his wife in front of the court, and traveled abroad. These reforms were alienating to those living in rural areas. Rural Afghans focused on religion as the primary social and political source.¹⁵ In response, Afghans from the countryside rebelled against such reforms, indicating the strength of Afghanistan's rural Pashtun communities. While this rebellion eventually dissipated, the subsequent civil war of 1929, due to issues with the King's leadership, proved fatal to Amanullah's reign as he surrendered and fled abroad.¹⁶

During this time, Afghanistan's future was unclear, with many vying for a chance to lead; at this moment, a Tajik bandit Habibullah Kalakani, usurped the Afghan throne after King Amanullah abdicated. Kalakani's leadership exposed the Afghan state's weakness. Furthermore, Kalakani's identity as a Tajik was almost heretical and preposterous, given the stronghold of

¹³ Crews, *Afghan Modern the History of a Global Nation*. 182

¹⁴ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Khost Rebellion was limited to parts of Eastern Afghanistan, it was only quelled with the aid of tribal levies. 5 years later, another rebellion took place because of the weaknesses presented during the Khost rebellion, making it easy for the bandit Habibullah Kalakani to declare himself Amir. 321

¹⁵ Barfield. 183

¹⁶ Barfield. Amanullah not only fled, but he abdicated, this was unprecedented and catastrophic to his reputation. 191

Pashtuns in the country; thus, Afghans ousted Kalakani after only nine months.¹⁷ It was during this time that a new era of rule came about, noted by Barfield as the Musahiban Dynasty 1929-1978, the most peaceful period in Afghan history.¹⁸ During this period, there were a few notable leaders, first was Nadir Khan, who initially led the war against Kalakani. Upon winning, Nadir Khan deduced that a Loya jirga would then decide the fate of Afghanistan, which ensured his political success.¹⁹ By composing the Loya jirga, the council, in turn, formally chose Nadir Khan as the leader of Afghanistan, prompting Nadir Khan to change his name to Nadir Shah. This change allowed Nadir Shah to distance himself from Amanullah's line, a move accepted by the average Afghan. Because of Nadir Shah's union with religious leaders, his claim and family lineage survived beyond his assassination, allowing his young son, Zahir Shah, to rule afterward. However, due to his young age, Zahir Shah's uncle, Hashim Khan, was the mastermind behind Afghan governance and the nearly 40 years of peace that came to define this era.²⁰

1973-1999

While there was peace and prosperity during Zahir Shah and Hashim Khan's reign, Afghanistan's respite was short-lived. Because soon, Zahir Shah's cousin, Daud Khan, staged a coup when Zahir Shah left for Italy. Daoud or Daud Khan led Afghanistan in two separate periods; the first was before Zahir Shah's official emergence as a leader in 1963. Zahir Shah's rule fast-tracked social changes throughout the decade while aiming to open Afghanistan's markets and relationships to others. These changes shifted Afghanistan's position and released it from its isolationist position imposed by Abdur Rahman. However, Afghanistan's new direction

¹⁷ Barfield. 192-193

¹⁸ Barfield. 195

¹⁹ Bezhan, "Loya Jirga -- An Afghan Tradition Explained." Loya Jirga is an Afghan practice that is a grand council of tribal and religious leaders.

²⁰ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. 200

was changed once more when Daud Khan remerged and reclaimed the throne for himself in 1973. Daud Khan instituted a Republic and formally abolished the core of Afghan politics, the monarchy. While this move was bold, it did not translate to a less totalitarian form of governance because the abolition of the monarchy did not change the political power structure.²¹ Instead, the political party relied on the strength of the Musahiban dynasty to establish the first-ever government-owned banks, the Bank Melli of Afghanistan and Da Afghanistan Bank. These institutions granted monopolies and imposed export tariffs along with currency exchange controls.²²

Workers' rights and leftist ideology based on Marxism formed the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA).²³ These ideas took root in the hearts of those Afghans reacting against the advances brought on by factories and foreign investments from the Soviet Union, Germany, and Britain, to Kabul. The centralization of these resources in Kabul alienated rural people; due to poor infrastructure, these investments and opportunities did not reach Afghans beyond the capital's borders. Ultimately, Afghanistan's more significant class issues and poverty were a key focus for the rise in the PDPA's popularity.²⁴ ²⁵ In the end, Afghanistan's leadership, once again, had to rely on foreign aid in the form of grants and loans to sustain itself. Such reliance formally ingratiated itself to almost every subsequent leader's economic plans. Therefore, Daud's government was a catalyst for the increased foreign support, as his regime made up nearly two-thirds of its revenue from aid.²⁶

²¹ Barfield. 200

²² Barfield. 203

²³ Crews, *Afghan Modern the History of a Global Nation*. 279

²⁴ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. 203-4

²⁵ Crews, *Afghan Modern the History of a Global Nation*. 280

²⁶ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. 205

The PDPA staged a coup that led to the murder of Daud Khan, ensuring the end of the Muhammadzai rulers, the last dynasty ruler. Thus, with rising economic tensions and the push for social reform, dissent brewed, leading to the end of Daud Khan's reign in 1978.²⁷ Despite internal conflicts and economic issues, this period was peaceful as it did not involve foreign intervention, wars, or major international disputes.²⁸ The relative peace would all end, as the PDPA and its left-leaning ideologies sparked the interests of Britain, the United States, and other western capitalists, who recognized the threat that Afghanistan posed if it were a communist regime. Nonetheless, the rise of the PDPA was known as the Saur Revolution, and it mobilized the Khalqis to become the dominant group in the faction and the vanguard for social change. Education, land reform, and family law were at the top of the list; meanwhile, the Khalqi faction ignored other social institutions like the clergy and cultural customs.²⁹ ³⁰ It was no wonder that the PDPA allied with the Soviet Union.

Despite a strong ally, the new Afghan government had many issues to contend with, primarily problems dealing with legitimacy, establishing trust, policy implementation, and binding modernist Kabulis to rural Afghans bent on preserving Islamic traditions and long-established social structures.³¹ Modernist Kabulis were from wealthier backgrounds, often privileged with living in the capital with access to education and economic opportunity. Furthermore, British, Indian, and Russian cultural influence infiltrated the lives of many Kabulis, exposing them to new ideas and cultures. Meanwhile, rural Afghans were distanced from these privileges due to their geography and often were subsistence farmers exposed to very few outside

²⁷ Barfield. 170

²⁸ Barfield. 217

²⁹ Barfield. 225

³⁰ Crews, *Afghan Modern the History of a Global Nation*. 282

³¹ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. 227

resources or ideologies. Rural Afghans were preoccupied with their survival, contingent upon their involvement with cultural and religious institutions. As a result, geography, access to education, economic status, and social interactions with outside communities separated Afghans. Privileges of education with social and economic advantages almost entirely belonged to a select few ethnic groups and their sub-sects; who enjoyed Kabul living. Despite rural, Pashtun Afghans being the majority, their absence from capital life enraged and sparked significant discontent and led to resistance movements.³²

Therefore, the differences in the PDPA government were apparent, as it focused on the capital and pushed for greater secularization, even more so than in previous regimes. While the government remained primarily Pashtun, with Nur Muhammad Taraki in power as President and premier in July 1978, the Pashtun leader ignored the desires and expectations of rural Afghans.³³ As a result, Taraki's leadership in the PDPA was unlike Afghanistan's other leaders. For one, Taraki was not part of the dynastic line and did not deal with rivalries against cousins, uncles, and nephews. However, Taraki was not exempt from internal struggles in his government. For example, while domestic rivals did not challenge his power, others like Hafizullah Amin splintered the PDPA party. Amin's efforts in manufacturing discontent and dividing the PDPA into a pro-Amin or pro-Taraki government were reminiscent of previous familial conflicts. During this time, Taraki urged the Soviet Union to deploy troops to Afghanistan and help keep his government alive, a plea that went unanswered as the Soviets did not fully trust Taraki and did not want to alienate the Afghans.³⁴

³² Barfield. 227 While Pashtuns ruled the central government, they were removed from rural Pashtun communities, as many of them were raised with other ethnic groups in the Capital. Their distance from the experiences of rural Afghans made them inept leaders, and prompted a misunderstanding in social values.

³³ Barfield. 229

³⁴ Barfield. 233-4

To maintain control over the PDPA, the Soviets wanted to leverage their position to provide aid and restore order; therefore, the Soviets invaded on December 27, 1979.³⁵ While Amin vied for the leadership position, this did not come to fruition; instead, the Soviets backed Babrak Karmal in a decade-long occupation.³⁶ Barfield examines the impact of the Soviet invasion and states that "...the Soviet invasion resulted in the deaths of one million Afghans, the flight of four million refugees to Pakistan and Iran, and the displacement of millions of others, internally."³⁷ This account depicts the gravity of the situation and the incoming trials and tribulations that Afghans would have to endure in the coming decades. Ultimately, Taraki's death by Amin revealed the Afghan government's fragility.

The Soviets invaded for many reasons; the stakes for their invasion revolved around expansion and influence. Soviet objectives were clear, by establishing relations with Afghanistan, they would cease ties with the West or neighboring countries with Western interests. Next, the Soviet Union's mission revolved around assisting Third World nations in presenting their development as successes intended to increase global status while influencing Afghanistan's foreign policy and economic conditions. Lastly, they planned to control a country bordering Iran and Pakistan, with close ties to the United States. Thus, the Soviet invasion was a problem for Afghanistan and the western world.³⁸

Since the United States and the Soviet Union entered the Cold War, the expansion of either region's influence was a significant threat to the other. While the Soviets were invited in more or fewer terms by the PDPA and Kabul's leadership, the invasion was a considerable threat

³⁵ Barfield. 234

³⁶ Barfield. 234

³⁷ Barfield. 234

³⁸ Payind, "Soviet – Afghan Relations From Cooperation to Occupation." 113

to western capitalist nations, primarily the United States, as the Soviets spread the Communist Revolution beyond its borders to Afghanistan. The United States armed resistance movements in response and encouraged capitalist ideologies. Soon, Afghanistan became a site of resistance for the U.S. to start a proxy war while maintaining Cold War boundaries³⁹ By creatively mobilizing a strong opposition; the United States funneled money and arms via Pakistan to Islamic jihadi groups. Manipulating the direction of the war involved using extremist Islamic ideology to stoke the flames of dissent, a form of resistance that played extensively to the interests of Saudi Arabia. Specifically, the Godless ideology of communism threatened Afghanistan's rural and conservative factions. Therefore, by stoking the flames of extremist Islamic ideology, Pakistan was able to spark resistance movements while opening the door for a pro-Pakistan government in Kabul. Due to decades of border tensions surrounding the idea of Pashtunistan, Pakistan used the moment to open pathways of influence in Afghanistan, both to align themselves with the U.S. and to gain power.⁴⁰

United resistance fronts were rare in Afghanistan has demographic diversity that qawms or tribes have always taken precedence in conflicts, and therefore unity towards one cause was rare. On the other hand, the resistance to the Soviet occupation was a new form of aggression that Afghanistan had never seen before, as Islamic groups had never gained national support.⁴¹ But in this instance, jihad, or a holy war based on preserving and maintaining Islam, had become

³⁹ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. 236

⁴⁰ Bezhan, "Loya Jirga -- An Afghan Tradition Explained." Pashtunistan- is a region in Afghanistan and Pakistan where after the partition of India, was annexed to Pakistan, but is highly contested territory by the ethnic Pashtuns of Afghanistan, the territory was removed from Afghanistan by British India, and is part of the Durand Line disputes.

⁴¹ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. 236

the center of the resistance and unity against the godless Soviets. Thus, the jihadi group named themselves the Mujahideen, warriors of the faith.⁴²

Interestingly, the ethnic makeup of the resistance and the demographic of jihadi groups like the Taliban linked to one main faction of Afghan society, rural Pashtuns. Primarily the jihadi groups were of Pashtun origins and grew up in nearby Pakistan, mainly in refugee camps, their extremist ideology bred within the confines of the borderlands between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the case of the Mujahideen, those exiled in the 1970s were considered leaders in the resistance.⁴³ As Pakistan unleashed extremists to take over, Pakistan's ISI, their intelligence agency, utilized humanitarian aid directed toward Afghan refugees on Pakistan's border to recruit soldiers for the resistance and establish patronage networks.⁴⁴ Pakistan's desire to recruit soldiers for the opposition was one method of alleviating their refugee populations; with a Mujahideen win, Afghans within their borders would repatriate back. Additionally, Pakistan's interests in Kabul were to install a pro-Pakistan government.

Meanwhile, the PDPA, backed by the Soviets, fought back just as hard, despite the collateral damage to Afghans, as they conducted "air bombardments, widespread use of land mines, search and destroy sweeps, and depopulation of much of the countryside."⁴⁵ The widespread use of these tactics led to the mass displacement of people internally and externally. Once more, Afghans found themselves amid a war in which neither side represented their interests. Regardless, after the death of Brezhnev, the Soviet Union General Secretary who led the Communist Party, the financial and diplomatic cost of the war, along with the lack of

⁴² Barfield. 236

⁴³ Barfield. 236

⁴⁴ Barfield. 236

⁴⁵ Barfield. 238

popularity in Russia, the Soviets began to accept peace negotiations from the U.N.⁴⁶ The talks came at a price; the Soviets wanted to maintain their influence in the country, so part of their withdrawal was the removal of Babrak Karmal with the replacement of Najibullah or Dr. Najib.⁴⁷ Karmal's leadership style was chaotic, as his primary focus was to remain in power and gain the favor of Soviet leadership. However, soon, Karmal could not deal with the mass opposition against them and lost the support of the Soviets. The installment of Dr. Najib was an attempt to remedy the image of the Soviets and regain control of Afghanistan. While Dr. Najib struggled to remain in power, his hopes of maintaining his government died when the Soviet Union fell in 1991, formally ending the government of the PDPA and his presidency.⁴⁸

The power vacuum that ensued would lay the foundation for the rise of the Taliban. First, after Najibullah's defection, the Islamist party that belonged to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, an Afghan politician and leader of the Hezb-e-Islami, a conservative religious faction made up of Pashtun tribes, joined forces with the Khalqi.⁴⁹ Then, Abdul Rashid Dostum, a prominent army commander in the communist government with a large ethnic Uzbek following, and Kayani's Ismail militias revolted against Dr. Najib's troops allied with Ahmad Shah Masud's Tajiks.⁵⁰ Ahmad Shah Masud was the Tajik leader from the North, Panjsher valley, known for his ferocity and guerrilla tactics. These allied groups set the scene for a series of conflicts that would further divide ethnic lines and give Pakistan a chance to involve itself in the power struggle. Initially, their union pushed the Soviets out, but with the demise of the Soviets, the power vacuum post-Soviet withdrawal opened the door for a significant shift in Afghan leadership.

⁴⁶ Barfield. 239

⁴⁷ Barfield. 239

⁴⁸ Barfield. 245

⁴⁹ Barfield. 248

⁵⁰ Barfield. 248

External power like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan took the opportunity to prop one side over the other. Specifically, these countries backed Hekmatyar's side and shelled the capital (Kabul) against the sitting President Rabbani.⁵¹ During 1992-1995, Kabul went through a level of violence and destruction it had never experienced before. Only through a stalemate in 1994 did Afghanistan regain some peace. The standoff came because neither side had enough support to extend and progress past their regions.

Given that most of the fighting was due to foreign intervention and aid, the message was clear, Afghanistan and its factions were a failed entity, unable to maintain power. Chaos ensued as peace and security dwindled to nothing, with local populations enduring many cases of abuse, high rates of rape, and pillaging, leading to complete lawlessness. During this time, Pakistan continued its efforts to gain control of the situation. Recognizing the preoccupation of global powers in the Cold War, western powers overlooked Pakistan's arms and defense build-up, leading to their nuclear arms formation. Now a significant force, Pakistan aimed to build on its emergence as atomic power and influencer by installing a more friendly regime in Kabul.⁵² This regime would ideally give Pakistan an ally against India and a stronghold in Afghanistan.

During the chaos, the lack of security and peace gave rise to the Taliban, an insurgency group emerging from the refugee camps dotted along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.⁵³ The population of vulnerable refugees, coupled with the largely Pashtun groups in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, fostered the growth of the insurgency group, as vulnerable people united by a common language and goal to return to their ancestral lands sparked a movement that would

⁵¹ Barfield. 250

⁵² Barfield. 252

⁵³ Crews, Robert D. and Tarzi, Amin, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, 6th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). 59

breed dissent and extremism. Specifically, the Taliban were able to use their identities as Pashtuns to assimilate or sideline many entrenched and hardened local Pashtun leaders who convinced their community members to join the fight.⁵⁴

The history and rise of the Taliban are relevant understandings of Afghanistan's path after its civil war period (1992-1996). The Taliban's emergence has two diverging stories. From the Taliban's accounts, according to Robert Crews D, who interviewed and lived with the insurgency group for years, the Taliban originated in Qandahar in *mid-1994* as a group forged to instill security and control. Their leader, Mullah Omar, a minor cleric, gathered students or (*Talibs*), who had complained about the lawlessness and abuses of local commanders in the region. In response to the chaos and lack of civility, Mullah Omar and his *Talibs* took action and instilled control of the country through guerilla tactics and armed attacks.⁵⁵ The Taliban seized control and immediately stored peace in Qandahar.

In another version, their origins trace back to Pakistan's issues with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. In this version of the Taliban origin story, the group emerges from discontent between Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Burhanuddin Rabbani. Pakistan favored Hekmatyar and relied on his ability to win against Rabbani in the Afghan civil war (1992-1996). Despite a victory in 1996, Hekmatyar's tactics and partnership with Ahmad Shah Massoud angered Pakistan. Soon, funding and support from Pakistan shifted from Hekmatyar to the Taliban. The shift gave the Taliban a source of aid and formally legitimized them in the region.⁵⁶

Whatever the story, the fact remains that the Taliban were able to rally the Afghans toward an ideology and regime that promised stability and an end to criminality. These promises

⁵⁴ Crews and Tarzi. 61

⁵⁵ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. 257

⁵⁶ Barfield. 257

earned them popularity as they disarmed criminal bands, tore down the checkpoints extorting money from traders and travelers, and assured a traumatized society that had endured 15 years of violence of security.⁵⁷ Additionally, they burned poppy fields and endeared themselves to the U.S. and Pakistan, along with Western media organizations that depicted the insurgency group favorably, downplaying their religious zeal. Their religious piety came at a price that Afghanistan had yet to experience. The spiritual ideals were more fundamentalist in interpretation, with a strict focus on Sharia. While Afghanistan was and is a very religious and conservative society, the understanding and practice of Sharia were reasonably loose compared to the reforms introduced by the Taliban. Specifically, the Taliban implemented laws to stop women and girls from going to school, working, and outside the home. Still, this practice was never effective in cities throughout Afghanistan's history.

Therefore, because Afghan practices were considered too liberal by the Taliban, their invasion was enflamed by their mission to implement Sharia-based civic order. The Taliban immediately seized public control, closed girls' schools, and invoked strict social and familial codes to unify Afghanistan under one charge, Islamic fundamentalism.⁵⁸ However, the path was not open for the Taliban as they still had to fight against Masud's forces daily, with new gains and losses, inviting the additional attention of foreign interests, specifically Pakistan. After all, the Taliban were Pakistan's creature, with social capital created via the madrasas in Pakistan's refugee camps in addition to the groups linked to political networks tied to Pakistani parliamentarians; the evidence was clear that this new power was created, bought off, and paid for by Pakistan.⁵⁹ Many concluded that Pakistani support for the Taliban was because the

⁵⁷ Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*. 64

⁵⁸ Crews and Tarzi. 64

⁵⁹ Crews and Tarzi. 70

Taliban acted as a proxy army for them in Afghanistan.⁶⁰ This relationship and its revelation would contribute to their struggle to maintain power in the coming years, especially after 9/11.

While the Taliban continued to gain momentum, with nearly everything in their favor, their external relations ultimately jeopardized their success. First, they did not push past their parochial Pashtun base to gain support, and they relied heavily on their external connections to Pakistan and al Qaeda Arabs, a threat to the belief that the Taliban were to be a result of civil war.⁶¹ Next, they could not gain international recognition from their government except Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.⁶² And lastly, the Taliban had little to no economic development besides a dependence on foreign aid. Pakistan supported the Taliban greatly but could not provide the long-term support necessary to sustain Afghanistan into the new century. Thus, despite their disdain for western countries and support, the Taliban relied on the United Nations. The diverging values of the Taliban regime and the U.N. and the humanitarian imperative to provide aid merged their goals, encouraging the U.N. to provide minimal assistance.⁶³ This assistance would serve as a base of support for the Taliban to continue their civil war and maintain their influence.

For five years, the Taliban were the primary power in Afghanistan; however, they did not have control of every province, but their influence was undeniably present in most of the country. The relationship between the Taliban and al Qaeda ultimately led to the fall of the Taliban and provided the proper excuse for western intervention, the U.S. and NATO invasion.⁶⁴ Initially, many of the abuses that the Taliban imposed on Afghan civilians proved

⁶⁰ Crews and Tarzi. 73-4

⁶¹ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. 263

⁶² Barfield. 264

⁶³ Barfield. 264-5

⁶⁴ Barfield. 268

inconsequential to western forces; instead, it was actions taken by al Qaeda, an Arab jihadi group led by Osama bin Laden that garnered the attention of the United States. Beginning in 1998, the Taliban faced the wrath of the United States and Saudi Arabia as they urged the Taliban to give up bin Laden to The United States due to the attacks he had been mounting abroad.⁶⁵ To this, the Taliban refused, citing the Pashtunwali code of honor and Afghan hospitality as the reason for not deporting the leader of al Qaeda and expelling him from Afghanistan, a grave mistake for the Taliban.

The strike against the twin towers, the pillars of U.S. capitalist supremacy by al Qaeda, was an act of aggression that prompted immediate action. Despite the Taliban themselves distancing themselves from the global jihad that bin Laden had broadcasted in 1996, they did not take seriously the threats that were coming from the United States, that is, until after 9/11. Therefore, negotiations ended when the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, still upheld his notions of hospitality and did not immediately give over to bin Laden. Thus, the United States invaded and drove out the Taliban. The United States utilized high technology to combat the low-tech, rural Taliban militias.⁶⁶ The pushback ended the in-fighting and civil war, as the American invasion instilled a moment of peace. The peace, in addition to the geographical distance of the United States, made it improbable they would annex Afghanistan, which led to an initial acceptance of American troops in the region, primarily amongst non-Pashtuns.⁶⁷ However, a more significant problem lay before them. Afghans and Americans were faced with rebuilding an Afghanistan that had been destroyed, a country bereft of proper political leaders, a small middle class, and massive famines due to years of war.

⁶⁵ Barfield. 268

⁶⁶ Barfield. 276

⁶⁷ Barfield. 277

2000-2015

Amid great uncertainty and state formation, Hamid Karzai and the U.S. state-building project began to take shape. Hamid Karzai was an ex-Mujahideen leader with a political background stemming from his father's time. His ethnic membership in the Popalzai tribe, alongside his education in France, made him a wise choice for the United States and the Afghan people. As a result, Karzai was elected President of the Transitional Government on June 13, 2002.⁶⁸ The United States, unlike previous foreign invasions, did not have a government to contend with or against in their support of Karzai; as a result, the people were able to accept the transitory government and the peace that came along. The United States decided to remain in Afghanistan to create a new state and restore stability.⁶⁹

Restoring stability and building a state involved more effort than previously assumed because many political elites had left the country or were murdered. As a result, the state had little to work with in finding a true leader. Furthermore, those who returned were a new Afghan generation; these people had experienced different governing structures and educational opportunities, so they had higher expectations for the new Afghanistan. Returnees were from Pakistan, Iran, or other nearby countries. They had experienced the stability of other governments, were provided resources and aid from international institutions as refugees, and were used to receiving assistance, support, and opportunities beyond subsistence standards.⁷⁰ These expectations dissipated when the United States decided to reach back into the old Pashtun Durrani line. Placing Hamid Karzai at the helm of power was the best that the United States

⁶⁸ "Hamid Karzai | World Leaders Forum."

⁶⁹ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. 272

⁷⁰ Barfield. 281-2

could do, given the country's disarray.⁷¹ While Afghanistan was a failed state, it was not a failed nation; many experiences united them, a shared collective trauma forged during the Soviet invasion and subsequent wars that coalesced the government into one country, despite the failures of past governing bodies.⁷²

Karzai's presidency from 2004-2014 proved weak and ineffective; the initial state-building actions taken by the United States and agreed upon by the Bonn Accord in Germany set out the path most reflective of the interests of international actors.⁷³ There were several reasons for the failure of his government. First, the patrimonial government that Karzai implemented only created destructive issues of mismanagement and corruption. Next, the United States and the aid it provided made a widely corrupt system. Subsequently, the distrust fostered in the widely corrupt government contributed to greater reliance on Western intervention, often discounting Afghan input. For example, instead of considering local perspectives and local businesses or community members to hire and build Afghanistan's infrastructure, the U.S. and its funders-built schools and hospitals through foreign labor. At the same time, unemployment ran rampant, along with hefty cash subsidies to government officials and offices that utilized these funds for personal projects.⁷⁴ Despite these glaring issues, the entirety of the U.S. involvement was a series of failed attempts at state-building as mismanagement, corruption, and lawlessness increased.

Hamid Karzai's official presidency began in 2004; his time was fraught with instability, corruption, and reports of involvement in drug trafficking. Karzai became President during the

⁷¹ Smith, "A Selection of Historical Maps of Afghanistan (G&M Reading Room, Library of Congress)." Durrani Line-Ahmad Shah Durrani was a leader prior to the "Great Game" and his lineage split into different units, where descendants became leaders of each unit. Hamid Karzai's ancestry stems from this Pashtun group.

⁷² Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. 278

⁷³ Barfield. 283

⁷⁴ Barfield. 283-285

presidency of George W. Bush and continued to be in power until Barack Obama's second term. Pieces of Karzai's administration indulged in corruption, nepotism, and trafficking. One of the final blows to his administration's reputation was the death of his half-brother, Ahmad Wali Karzai. His brother was an influential leader in southern Afghanistan. However, reports indicated that his death was due to his connections to the Afghan drug trade.⁷⁵ As a result, the circumstances of his brother's death exposed the general corrupt practices of his administration. While President Karzai's Presidency was fraught with issues, his relationship with the United States ensured the pushback of the Taliban. Karzai's ties to the United States also provided a peaceful transition of power when he stepped down in 2014.

With \$500 million, the international community sustained the transition government designed to give peace between the two factions vying for power post-Karzai. Abdullah Abdullah, Karzai's foreign minister during his first term, was a major contender for the presidency due to his valuable relationship with the Northern forces. Having fought the Taliban consistently, the North made for a strong ally, and a leader from such a region was instrumental in maintaining the Kabul government. However, this was contentious as Ashraf Ghani, the Pashtun leader, was also a contender and a favorite among the international community. Connected to the West as a western educated man from Columbia with children born and raised in the United States, Ghani was the only candidate to support, despite his low approval ratings of only 3%.⁷⁶ The Afghan people's lack of support for Ghani led to an election year that led to the co-presidency of both Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, effectively splitting the government post-Karzai.

⁷⁵ Partlow and Sieff, "Ahmed Wali Karzai, Half Brother of Afghan President, Killed by Trusted Confidant - The Washington Post."

⁷⁶ Murtazashvili, "Afghanistan in 2014." 33-34

Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah's union was tumultuous, with each side vying to appoint ministers over the other, resulting in an ineffectual government with a fragile reputation. In this transitory period, by the end of 2014, the Taliban gained traction as they attacked Afghan forces, leading to more than 4,600 deaths.⁷⁷ These deaths, coupled with the disputes between the leaders, revealed the instability of the Afghan government. As a result, the United States announced it would increase its presence by 1,000 additional troops. However, despite the increase in American company, the Taliban continued their attacks. In November, they orchestrated a suicide attack that killed more than 60 civilians in Yahya Khel in Paktika province.⁷⁸ As a result, the peaceful transition was surprising yet predictably unstable. Ultimately, the Ghani/Abdullah Government faced the same security issues as previous governments.

Security issues in Afghanistan have always been expected, from the Soviets to the Taliban. The patronage of insurgency groups by external forces has manifested to represent the ongoing security dilemma of the Afghan state. The Taliban have historically been an insurgency group, trained and developed on the Pakistan-Afghan region's border in Pakistan's refugee camps. They were the youth that grew up without their fathers and mothers. Pakistan's government trained, funded, and encouraged the Taliban to fight for Afghanistan in the hopes that with a Taliban victory, the refugees on their lands would repatriate while holding favorable relations with Islamabad.⁷⁹ Uncovering the background of the Taliban is critical in understanding the historical progression of Afghanistan in the last 20 years. Because while the United States

⁷⁷ Murtazashvili. 30

⁷⁸ Murtazashvili. 31

⁷⁹ Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*. p. 10-12

and the international regime funded and supported the Afghan forces, the extremist ideology of the Taliban, coupled with the support of Pakistan, ensured their ultimate success.

2015-2022

The Taliban conducted a series of attacks throughout the last two decades while refashioning themselves into more legitimate authority by establishing diplomatic ties. Unlike the earlier version of the Taliban in the late 90s, the Taliban of today have utilized their relationship with Pakistan and their scorn of the West to build connections with China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and many other global powers. Ghani attempted to curb the Taliban's growth by growing closer to the western powers, forging a regional consensus against "terrorism," and taking away the Taliban's "religious decree," which involved using religious clerics to condemn Taliban actions. These attempts were unsuccessful as the Taliban continued to grow their presence, altering the future of Afghanistan.⁸⁰

In February 2018, Ghani's government began official attempts at establishing peace with the Taliban. The terms offered involved the recognition of the Taliban as a political party and amnesty for its fighters; the Taliban declined these terms. Then, in July 2018, the United States sent its diplomats to Doha, Qatar, to negotiate with the Taliban without the Afghan government's presence. The U.S. special representative for the Afghanistan reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad, traveled to Doha to meet the Taliban for continued talks, once more without the involvement of the Afghan government. Later, in October, Pakistan released the former Taliban deputy leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who became the group's representative for the peace talks in Doha. The meetings took eight months, and the Taliban and the U.S. discussed U.S./NATO military

⁸⁰ Khalil, "The Rise of Taliban Diplomacy."

withdrawal plans, counter-terrorism, and a ceasefire.⁸¹ Outlined in a joint declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (the Taliban) and the U.S., the peace talks between the two groups brought forth a resolution of peace to Afghanistan.⁸² The resolution between the U.S. and the Taliban without the involvement of the Afghan government contributed to the issues of illegitimacy and trust in the Afghan government. Therefore, it was no surprise when the United States withdrew in August of 2021, the Afghan forces and the Afghan government were not strong enough to resist the Taliban takeover. As a result, since August 30, 2021, the Taliban have taken the helm of power in Kabul and have spent the last year engineering a new Afghanistan.

In conclusion, Afghanistan's historical progression reveals some insight into its most pressing issue, insecurity. Afghanistan's security crisis has developed due to its geographic location, initially attracting the attention of Britain and Russia during the Great Game. This attention resulted in a division of territory, displacing communities and leading to tensions. These tumultuous beginnings reshaped Afghanistan's borders to harbor various religions, cultures, and languages. Despite the diversity of the Afghan people, Kabul remained Pashtun-centric, with dynasties ruling into the twenty-first century, demonstrating the importance of family lines and reputation as the legitimate power source. However, each dynasty had its security concerns as internal family rivalries and displacement of one another via coups and nefarious circumstances drastically changed the people's conditions. Each new leader introduced new forms of governance, often shifting the spectrum from strict theocracy to modern democracy. Each shift destabilized Kabul and revealed gaps in the administrations' leading the country. Therefore, from the time of Abdur Rahman, Afghan leaders have depended on foreign

⁸¹ "Afghanistan Peace Talks Since 2018: A Timeline | Crisis Group."

⁸² "Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan." This declaration is made without the initial involvement of the Afghan government and was an agreement constructed due to negotiations between Pakistan, the United States and the Taliban.

support to strengthen their legitimacy and increase their influence. However, these tactics and dependency on aid only exposed Afghanistan to additional influence and intervention from its neighbors and Western powers. As a result, Afghanistan's turmoil has developed from a series of internal issues to a global dilemma involving multiple global powers and regional actors to produce and direct its state structure. Ultimately, Afghanistan's history reveals the connections between foreign interests to internal conflicts as inseparable issues, connected by cycles of violence and terrorism pushing people to leave their homes to seek refuge in neighboring countries and beyond.

Chapter II – Migration Flows

Introduction

Situating Afghan migration history within the context of violence, state instability, and its relationship with global powers like the United States is integral to understanding push and pull factors related to the country's evacuation, migration, and refugee patterns. Following the events of 1919, Afghanistan became an official state, free from British rule, as announced by King Amanullah, the grandson of King Abdur Rahman and son of Habibullah (1901-1919). King Amanullah's proclamation of freedom incited a third war with the British, culminating in an Afghan victory.⁸³ Essential to this time were state-building efforts in a region where leaders were prolific and followers rare. Thus, the desire to include over a dozen ethnic groups, with over 50 languages under one territory with one leader, overwhelms state-building efforts as the threat of internal conflict shapes the basis of Afghan nationhood.

Therefore, the Afghans living abroad for nearly 50 years (1979- 2022) are partly the products of a historically unstable and weak state. In conjunction with foreign influence and invasion, Afghan state-building efforts reveal gaps in governance, safety, and economic opportunity, pushing factors in the flow of Afghan refugees as each attack prompted record numbers of refugee evacuations and the migration of refugees out of Afghanistan. Lastly, these periods of decade-long international conflict permanently altered the economic conditions of Afghans and prompted their departure.

The Afghan State

Afghanistan's statehood historically has been tangential to its relationship with other global powers. Even in its construction, the borders of Afghanistan were inventions of British

⁸³ Crews, *Afghan Modern the History of a Global Nation*. 84

and Russian polities. Therefore, Afghanistan shares borders with six countries harboring cooperative and volatile relationships. Some neighboring states based their ties with Afghanistan on trade and exporting opportunities; others became safe havens for those persecuted, like in 1910 when three thousand Hazara-Afghans fled to Russia following the suppression of a revolt in 1888.⁸⁴ Therefore, Afghanistan's geography presents the most significant feature of its progress as a state, as nearby nations are involved in shaping its political and economic success while providing pathways for migration.

Following its separation from the United Kingdom, Afghanistan as a formally recognized state depended upon its ability to wield power. Formidably, the power to control mobility is essential to demonstrating sovereignty.⁸⁵ Proper governance for the burgeoning Afghan state depended on its ability to aggregate loyalty, support, and economic power while maintaining its population. Therefore, migratory patterns for Afghans were connected to trade and commerce and religious pilgrimages.⁸⁶ Most of the travel by Afghans during early Afghan statehood was via the Indian railway lines, the Transcaspian Railroad, and steamships. These journeys were productive endeavors as they introduced Afghan goods to Russian territories and beyond. Furthermore, the trade pathways resulted in Afghans' ability to perform pilgrimages to Hajj, Saudi Arabia, which became an increasingly common affair. In fact, by 1927, Afghans were the fourth largest group performing Hajj by sea.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Crews. (95)

⁸⁵ Crews. (86)

⁸⁶ Pourzana, "The Problematic of Female Education, Ethnicity, and National Identity in Afghanistan (1920-1999)."

⁸⁷ Crews, *Afghan Modern the History of a Global Nation*. (p. 90) 3,858 people were recorded by British Intelligence reports to have gone to Hajj.

The Soviet Union formally recognized Afghanistan's sovereignty in 1921 after King Amanullah initiated diplomatic relations with the Bolsheviks.⁸⁸ Following the recognition by the Soviet Union, European states like Germany, Turkey, Italy, and France too began to recognize Afghanistan. The United States formally recognized Afghanistan in 1934.⁸⁹ The Kingdom's ability to obtain recognition solidified its ties and opened the gates to diplomatic relationships, trade, commerce, and influence. Specifically, Afghanistan's relationship with the Soviets encouraged diplomatic relations that bred political troubles.

The political relations were established under Zahir Shah's rule, as he became the King of Afghanistan and maintained his monarchy for nearly four decades. These decades were tumultuous in some sense, as the King relied on support from the British and the Russians. His ability to maintain relations with global powers continued into WWII, as he maintained neutrality with the allies and established ties with Germany. These relations were an attempt by Zahir Shah to better Afghanistan through foreign support to modernize the country. These efforts resulted in setting up the country's first University and developing the nation's airline, *Ariana*, in (Q)Kandahar.⁹⁰

These developments aided the country's golden trade age and exports, with Afghanistan earning over \$100 million in reserve by the end of WWII. These exports and relations meant mobility and travel for the middle class, specifically to Moscow. Therefore, relations between Afghanistan, Russia, and later the Soviet Union were amicable until 1979.

⁸⁸ Borer, "Soviet Foreign Policy toward Afghanistan 1919-1988." (p. 30)

⁸⁹ state.gov, "Afghanistan - Countries - Office of the Historian."

⁹⁰ Cullather, "Damming Afghanistan: Modernization in a Buffer State." (p. 514)

Soviet Destruction

During the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviet government dropped 30 million landmines in Afghanistan; mines ravaged the youth, as many children playing were blown away by unknowingly stepping on the bombs.⁹¹ Meanwhile, more recent assessments of landmines fluctuated between half a million to over 2 million landmines that dropped during the invasion. Such actions inspired the rage of Afghans and shifted the paradigm of support to the United States.

Ultimately, the United States and international bodies convened to remove the mines from 1990-2000. By removing 205,842 antipersonnel mines, 9,199 antitank mines, and 1,054,738 un-exploded ordinances from Afghan soil, the international community and the United States exposed the gravity of the Soviet invasion and its effects.⁹² Removing millions of mines, over 50 different types, and tripwires decreased the injuries incurred by refugees repatriating to Afghanistan after the Cold War.

Land mines were only one form of military aggression; other reported uses of force included a war of attrition in which their ability to be mobile allowed them to use firepower to target civilian areas. They did so by scorching farming fields and practicing “migratory genocide,” in which they depopulated rebel-held, or Mujahideen areas, by carpet-bombing and initiating “free-fire” zones that decimated entire villages and pushed people out. Furthermore, they concealed antipersonnel mines in books, dolls, pens, watches, and other materials targeting women and children.⁹³

⁹¹ Lohr, “Moscow’s Millions of Deadly Seeds: Afghan Mines - The New York Times.” This is a report made right after the invasion of Afghanistan ended, and the numbers are estimates.

⁹² Lohr.

⁹³ Borer, “Soviet Foreign Policy toward Afghanistan 1919-1988.” (p. 103)

The legacy of these landmines, “free-fire” zones, carpet bombings, and a slew of other forms of military aggression continued for generations, contributing to the crisis Afghans faced, as injuries amassed to over 400,000 people by 1991 and made up 48% of all injuries during the time.⁹⁴ According to data and surveys conducted in 1993, the mortality for children under five years of age was 260 per 100,000, compared to refugee populations of 190 per 100,000, signifying the crisis of safety Afghan families encountered. By the end of 1989, nearly 900,000 Afghans had died as casualties of the Soviet invasion.⁹⁵ Ultimately, 80% of the children in refugee camps in districts such as Quetta were malnourished, a reflection of the impoverished conditions of refugees and a generalizable summary of conditions within Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion solidified Afghan dependence upon foreign aid and U.N. agencies.

1979-1989 Refugee Displacement

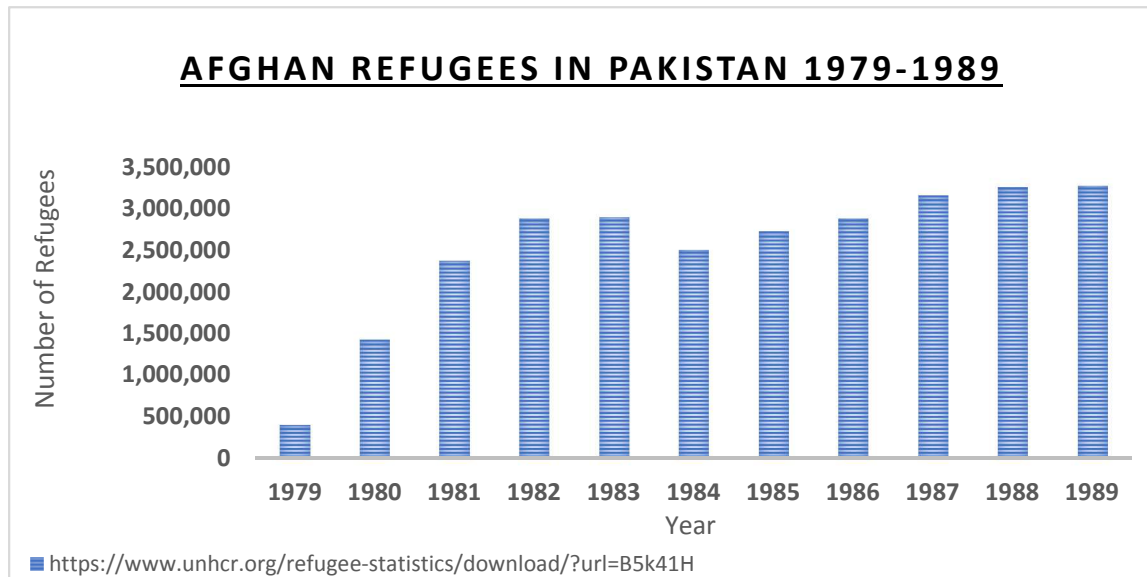
Over four million Afghans fled the country during the 1979 invasion, most seeking refuge in Pakistan and Iran; these countries accepted Afghan refugees due to their geographic proximity, sympathy for Afghans, and religious fellowship that encourages Muslims to take in their own. According to the U.N.H.C.R., by the end of 1979, 400,000 Afghans fled to Pakistan, and another 200,000 fled to Iran. The total number of Afghan refugees by 1990 rose to nearly 6.2 million. These refugee flows directly resulted from the Cold War, as the great powers used Afghanistan as a playground for their proxy wars.⁹⁶ Thus, data representing the number of Afghan refugees seeking refuge during the Soviet invasion reflects the measures people take when under attack and foreign aggression.

⁹⁴ Fraser, “Landmines: An Ongoing Environmental Health Problem for the Children of Afghanistan.” (p. 80) - Most of these mines were manufactures in Italy, China, U.S. Pakistan, Egypt, Britain, and former Czechoslovakia

⁹⁵ Bhutta, “Children of War: The Real Casualties of the Afghan Conflict.”

⁹⁶ Colville, “UNHCR - Refugees Magazine Issue 108 (Afghanistan: The Unending Crisis) - The Biggest Caseload in the World.”

Figure 1⁹⁷



The refugee camps in Pakistan were a vital resource to the displaced Afghans; they served as essential mechanisms of support and survival and a base to rebuild Afghan networks of resistance. Due to the millions of Afghans that relocated to Pakistan, the U.N.H.C.R. stepped in and established the largest refugee camp in history both for Pakistan and the U.N.H.C.R.⁹⁸ Furthermore, these camps became sites of resistance, as the Mujahideen, the resistance group formed against the Soviet Union invasion, stepped in and used the relationship that Pakistan had with the West (U.S.) to arm, train, and prepare to act against the Soviets. Thus, the U.N.H.C.R. considered these refugee camps “refugee-warrior communities.”⁹⁹

Afghan Displacement to Pakistan

Nearly 870,000 Afghans died during the Soviet invasion, and millions were displaced, with many fleeing to Pakistan due to proximity and affiliation with Pakistani languages and

⁹⁷ “UNHCR - Refugee Statistics.”

⁹⁸ Schoch, “UNHCR and the Afghan Refugees in the Early 1980s.” (p. 50)

⁹⁹ Schoch. (p. 51). These refugees became an issue for the UNHCR as fighters for the resistance against the occupation could not be classified as refugees, they complicated the situation and led to a blurring of the lines of between the humanitarian and the political, harming the UNHCR’s reputation.

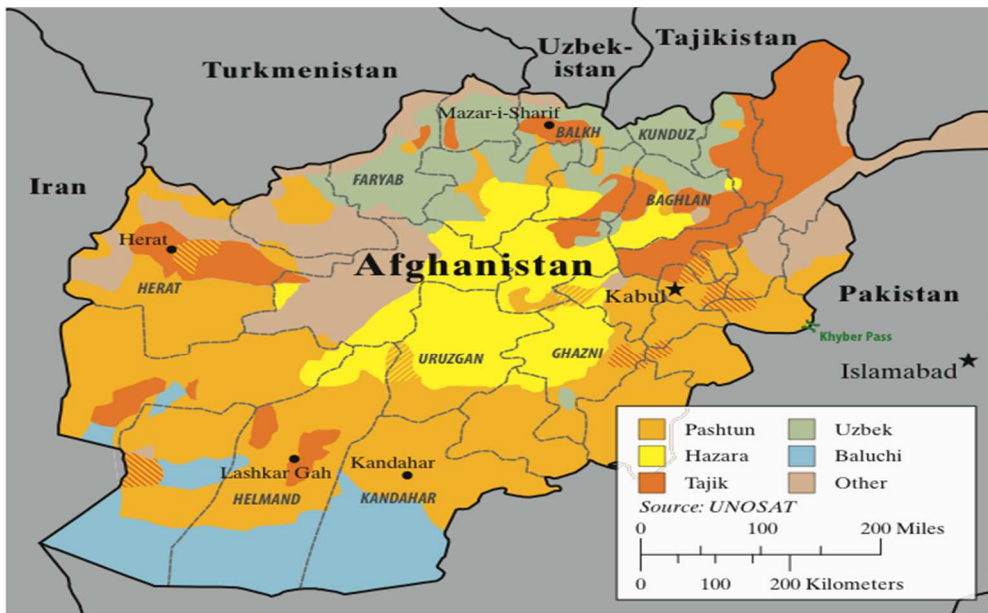
culture.¹⁰⁰ Due to the diverse makeup of Afghanistan, the division based on ethnicity, language, and religious affiliation influenced the decisions of Afghan refugees when they migrated.

Proportionally, Sunni Muslims with Pashtun backgrounds primarily went to Pakistan, and ethnic minorities with Shia backgrounds fled to Iran. Thus, proximity and similarities in faith (Sunni Islam); and language (Pashto, Urdu) were predictors of Afghan refugee flows to Pakistan.

In 1979, about ten provinces, primarily in southern and eastern Afghanistan, were populated by Pashtuns; Tajik predominated in northeastern Afghanistan, near the borders of Tajikistan, the Soviet Union, China, and India. Meanwhile, the Hazara groups are based in central Afghanistan, between the Pashtun and Tajik areas. Turkmen and Uzbeks live in northwestern Afghanistan, above the Aimak(q). The Baluchi groups were located in the southern region of Afghanistan, bordering Iran. (See Figure 2.)

¹⁰⁰ Jackson, "The Cost of War: Afghan Experiences of Conflict 1978-2009." (p. 22) While there is little information about exact numbers, there are reports that indicate people's comfort and perceptions of safety in each province that indicate their likelihood to travel to Pakistan instead of Iran.

Figure 2.¹⁰¹



An approximate map, based on UNOSAT data, of Afghanistan's major ethnolinguistic groups; striations indicate mixed areas

During the invasion, about 94% of the population in Pakistan were Pashtuns.¹⁰² Hosts of refugees were established in Baluchistan (72%), an area subdivided by Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan; another group was established in Mianwali and Punjab districts in Pakistan. Furthermore, other available reports mention that Pashtuns could relocate to Pakistan because some had kinfolk there due to Pakistan's Pashtun population. Those Afghans that were not Pashtun were from the Hazara and Baluch ethnic groups and were based in Quetta. However, as tensions during the invasion led to stricter religious nationalism, specifically an affiliation with Sunni groups in the camps, the Hazara group relocated to Iran. Iran is a Shiite Islamic region, more suitable to the Hazara group's religious affiliation.

¹⁰¹ "Should Afghanistan Exist? | Christopher de Bellaigue | The New York Review of Books." This data is part of the United Nations Satellite Centre and constructed by Mike King.

¹⁰² Dupree, "Demographic Reporting on Afghan Refugees in Pakistan." (p. 856)

Furthermore, the documentation of the persecution of Hazara's by Pashtuns led to the relocation of Hazara groups to Iran. Therefore, many of the groups in Pakistan hailed from Pashtun and Tajik tribes, with a small number of Hazara from Kabul. U.N.H.C.R. claims that 62% of those in their camps in Pakistan were from six provinces, 17% from Nangarhar, 11% from Kabul, 10% from Kandahar, and 8% from Kunduz.¹⁰³

While the Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmen ethnic groups were a smaller population of Afghans in Pakistan, they began to migrate more significantly as war and instability worsened post the Soviet withdrawal. Ethnic groups such as the Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmen from northern Afghanistan also moved to Pakistan. These groups established themselves in places like Karachi. Turkey allowed 4,000-5,000 Turkmen and Kyrgyz Afghans to seek refuge.¹⁰⁴

Afghans' age range and makeup during the Soviet invasion were primarily women and children. According to the Government of Pakistan (G.O.P.), among those refugees located in North-West Frontier Province (N.W.F.P.), 45.6% of the population were children under 15. Another 28.9% were adult females, and 25.41% were adult males. In Baluchistan, 51% were children under 15, 26% were adult females, and 23% were adult males.¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, most of these populations were children because, once in the camps, Afghan families had more children than assessed by the U.N., with an annual 3% growth rate higher than those within Afghanistan.^{106 107}

¹⁰³ Redden, "UNHCR - Pakistan's Census of Afghans Provides First Detailed Profile of the Population."

¹⁰⁴ Hafizullah, "Resettlement Pattern: The Afghan Refugees in Pakistan." These numbers are based on surveys and are not completely accurate. There are percentages based on the reports available from the UNHCR etc.

¹⁰⁵ Dupree, "Demographic Reporting on Afghan Refugees in Pakistan." (p. 849) It is important to note that age ranges and classifications of adult female and male is different than U.S. standards, as those under the age of 15 are children, meanwhile Pakistan during this time considers 15 and older to be of adult age.

¹⁰⁶ Redden, "UNHCR - Pakistan's Census of Afghans Provides First Detailed Profile of the Population."

¹⁰⁷ "Afghanistan Population 2022 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs)."

Iran

Iran shares a border with Afghanistan for 572 miles, a similar language to the official language of Afghanistan (Dari) and has been a significant host of Afghan refugees since 1979. Iran's relationship with Afghanistan has fluctuated from welcoming to hostile as protracted refugeehood, and an increase in Afghan populations exacerbated Iran's fragile economy. Initially, Iran's economy, while weak due to its war with Iraq (1980-1988), needed the labor provided by Afghan refugees. As a result, the numbers increased from 200,000 to over three million by the 1990s.¹⁰⁸ These Afghan refugees mostly lived outside camps and were more mobile than those in Pakistan. However, their status was more precarious as the U.N.H.C.R. did not provide Iran the same level of aid as they did Pakistan. As a result, Iran provided Afghan refugees with temporary stay permits, which restricted them to low-skill occupations.¹⁰⁹

Hazara Afghans were proportionally more significant in Iran because Afghan-Hazara's religious affiliation paralleled Iran's Shiite community. Thus, 34.6% of the Afghan refugees were Hazara, 22% were Tajiks, and 11% were Pashtun, reflecting a pattern for Afghan refugees that foreshadowed their future movements. Similarly, to the refugee demographics of Pakistan, those in Iran were also young; about 40% were under 14. Many of these refugees were women, about 48%, with 4.4% of these women heading their households.¹¹⁰

As conditions worsened in Afghanistan, the refugee populations increased exponentially, but the support from the international system, the U.N.H.C.R., remained the same. As a result, the ability of Iran to establish and maintain camps throughout the 1980s diminished. Iran was

¹⁰⁸ Colville, "UNHCR - Refugees Magazine Issue 108 (Afghanistan: The Unending Crisis) - The Biggest Caseload in the World."

¹⁰⁹ Wickramasekara et al., "ILO-UNHCR Cooperation Towards Comprehensive Solutions for Afghan Displacement: Afghan Households in Iran: Profile and Impact." (p. 4-5)

¹¹⁰ Wickramasekara et al. (p. 5)

only able to house 20,000 people in refugee camps; many refugees, as a result, dispersed into the cities and became unaccounted for, with registration systems being the only control mechanism.¹¹¹ Therefore, the difference in refugee maintenance in Iran was stark; while “refugee villages” did not, their integration into Iran was more seamless. They were issued blue cards, which gave them rights of residence and access to education while tracking their numbers. These policies allowed Afghan women and girls to mix freely and attend school, resulting in more educated and working Afghan refugee women in Iran than in Pakistan.¹¹² With 80% of the Afghan refugees fleeing due to war, Iran’s hospitality was exceptional during this time, as they accommodated Afghans. Another 11% immigrated to follow family members, and about 7% were economic migrants seeking better financial opportunities. These statistics build an initial framework for the motives of Afghans in seeking refuge in Iran. Ultimately, the Afghan refugees fled to Iran due to war and chose Iran over Pakistan because of religious and cultural similarities.

The End of Soviet Occupation

The Soviet Union had approximately 115,000 military personnel stationed throughout their time in Afghanistan; as the Soviets grew stronger, the Afghan armed forces grew weaker.¹¹³ The Soviet government proposed to pull out of Afghanistan only if Afghanistan remained unattached to any sphere of influence. Karmal’s government formally accepted this proposal in bilateral talks between Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. These talks stipulated the return of

¹¹¹ Colville, “UNHCR - Refugees Magazine Issue 108 (Afghanistan: The Unending Crisis) - The Biggest Caseload in the World.”

¹¹² Garakani, “PLACE-MAKING IN THE MARGINS: A CASE STUDY OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN IRAN (1980-2001).” (p. 12)

¹¹³ Borer, “Soviet Foreign Policy toward Afghanistan 1919-1988.” (p. 102) Afghan Army shrunk in numbers as many deserted or left due to ethnic divisions. The numbers were initially 100,000 in 1978 and dwindled down to 30,000 in 1981.

refugees, the cessation of armed interference, and the withdrawal of Soviet troops.¹¹⁴ Throughout the Soviet Union's development, the country remained vested in Afghanistan from the death of Brezhnev in 1982 to the selection of Gorbachev in 1985, and the commitment to stay in Afghanistan was unflinching. Soon, Karmal's government concluded with a peaceful replacement by Dr. Najibullah, the head of the Afghan secret police (K.H.A.D.), in 1987. Najibullah introduced a new policy called "National Reconciliation" and attempted to end the dissent between the rebel forces of Mujahideen and the Soviets. In this reconciliation, he offered amnesty and asked Afghan society to unite. In December 1987, Gorbachev announced the Soviet's intention to withdraw from Afghanistan in 12 months or less in a meeting with President Raegan. A Geneva agreement forged on May 15, 1988, set a deadline for the Soviet withdrawal with four stipulated conditions. The first was that Afghanistan and Pakistan would refrain from interfering in each other's affairs. The second was that all refugees would be allowed to return to Afghanistan, the third was that the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. guarantee Afghanistan's non-aligned status, and the withdrawal would conclude by November 15, 1988. The Soviet withdrawal began in February of 1989, their delayed and slow evacuation from Afghanistan was their last effort to control the meddling of western interests in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.¹¹⁵

The United States had been arming the Mujahideen (the resistance force) with Stinger AA missiles and other arms since 1986; the withdrawal of the Soviets presented a power vacuum for foreign interests to vie for influence.¹¹⁶ The vacuum also introduced a new path for Afghans, which had the potential for a new form of governance that differentiated from monarchies,

¹¹⁴ Borer. (p. 107) This proposal was outlined in Karmal's "May fourteenth Proposals" This proposal directly involved the Afghan government and was meant to signify the gains made by the regime as pledged by Brezhnev which backed Karmal's government and its sovereignty.

¹¹⁵ Hughes, "The Soviet-Afghan War, 1978-1989." (p. 343)

¹¹⁶ Hughes. (p. 344)

family lineages, and authoritarian governments propped up by foreign interests. Thus, the rise of the Mujahideen as a rebel group presented hope for a new Afghanistan forged in the sacrifice and power of the Afghan people. This potential was soon fraught with issues as factions within the Mujahideen emerged, bringing to the surface the old ethnic divisions of Afghanistan.

Afghan Civil War, 1992-1996

Between the time the Soviets left in February of 1989 and the formal recognition of the Mujahideen in 1992, the two-a-half years that Najibullah spent as president heavily depended on the aid provided by the Soviets. This aid and influence by the Soviets came at a price; with over 1 million Afghans killed and 6 million living in refugee camps, the tensions between Afghans and Najibullah's Soviet-supported government were at an all-time high. Initially, the government was able to defend itself against the growing Mujahideen. Still, after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Najibullah lost his means of support, and by April 1992, his supporters switched sides.¹¹⁷

The Mujahideen separated into three groups; the mostly Tajik-led group was formed under Ahmad Shah Massoud, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and Buhruddin Rabbani. These factions worked together during the Soviet invasion; however, without a common enemy, ethnic divisions, religious divides, and differing visions of a new Afghanistan collided. These collisions resulted in a renewed battle, driven by cleavages in language, custom, and the struggle between fundamentalist and moderate interpretations of Islam.¹¹⁸ Divisions built on religion proved the most effective as they invigorated and mobilized Afghans to a degree never seen, as religion was a significant driver in resisting the Soviets. Interpretations of Islam shaped the tensions in

¹¹⁷ Hughes. (p. 344-345)

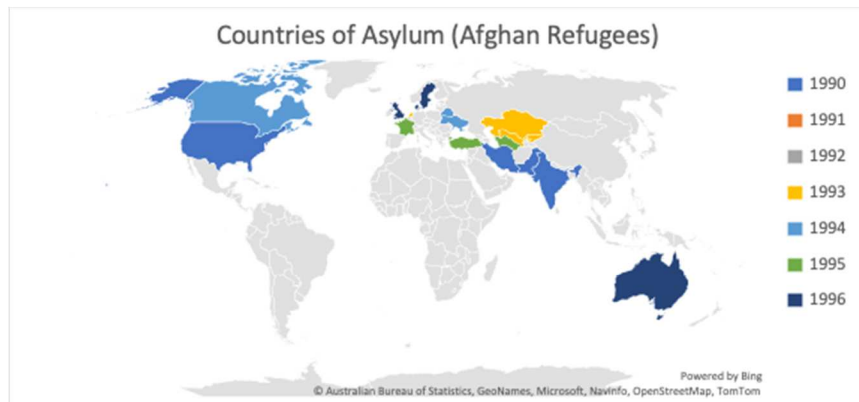
¹¹⁸ Tarzi, "Politics of the Afghan Resistance Movement: Cleavages, Disunity, and Fragmentation." (p. 480)

Afghanistan during its civil war while proving to be an awakening that would foreshadow subsequent Afghan affairs for decades to come.¹¹⁹

Refugees and internally displaced people during this time became more apparent as Afghans migrated beyond Pakistan and Iran. While most Afghan refugees were still constrained to these two frontline states, the involvement of western influence, and the instability of Afghanistan, prompted interest in western nations to accept Afghan refugees. As a result, the United States, Canada, Australia, and other frontline states such as Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan began to accept Afghan refugees by the mid-1990s. In this period, another faction emerged from the Taliban. Thus, the conflict in Afghanistan expanded to encompass not only dissent within the Afghan-composed Mujahideen but with the Afghan refugee-composed Taliban. The Taliban's origins stemmed from being children of war raised in Pakistani refugee camps. The Afghan-refugee-raised Taliban incited renewed violence. Thus, these factions contributed to mass dissent as Afghan refugees began to embark on arduous journeys thousands of miles away from their homes.

¹¹⁹ Tarzi. (p. 482)

Figure 3 ¹²⁰



Pakistan, 1990-1996

Afghan refugee populations in Pakistan declined from 1990-1996 as more people grew confident in their ability to return. Although some spikes and years signify trouble, the internal conflicts within Afghanistan did not raise refugee rates in places like Pakistan. Millions of people were returning from Iran, but only 200,000 returned from Pakistan during this time.¹²¹ While the rate of return was slower, the migration to Pakistan was also low. Those fleeing during the civil war compared to those returning from Pakistan were negligible. Pakistan's refugee population by the end of the civil war in 1996 remained constant, at 1.2 million.

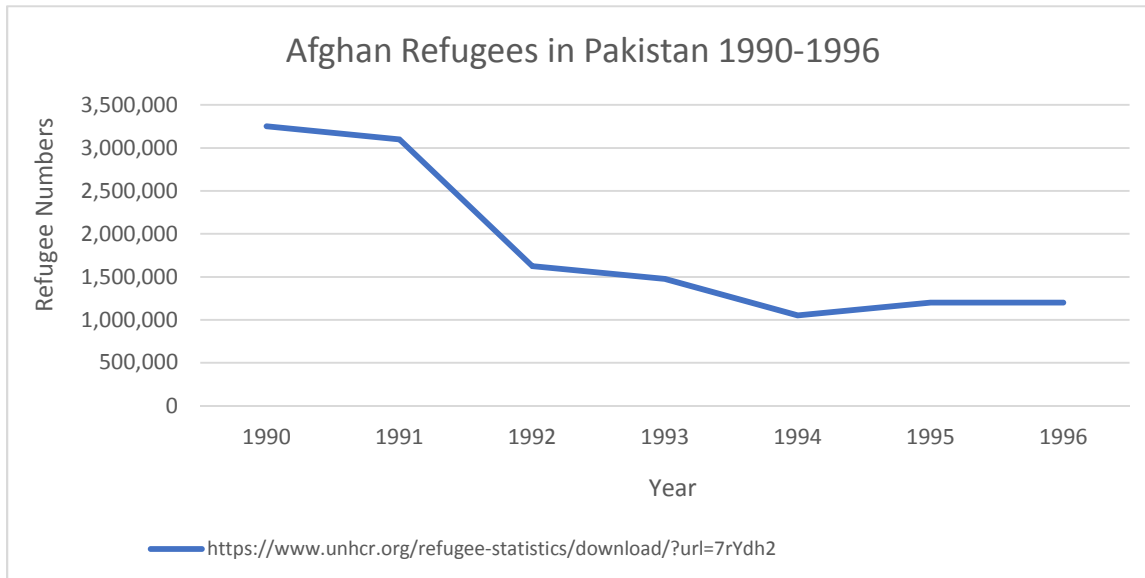
Another reason for the numbers remaining the same is that while people were returning, those who remained in camps were encouraged to continue having children. In fact, during the Presidency of Zia ul-Haq, Pakistan began Islamization policies that encouraged Afghan women to have children and to reproduce more Mujahideen and, later, produce more Taliban. These

¹²⁰ "UNHCR - Refugee Statistics - 1990-1996."

¹²¹ Colville, "UNHCR - Refugees Magazine Issue 108 (Afghanistan: The Unending Crisis) - The Biggest Caseload in the World."

conditions, coupled with the Islamic schools established along the Afghan-Pakistan border, provided a steady supply of soldiers for the civil war efforts of Hekmatyar, the favored fundamentalist Islamic leader. Consequently, these initiatives were the basis of Taliban expansion and the reason for the static Afghan refugee numbers in Pakistan.¹²²

Figure 4¹²³



Internal Displacement, 1993-1996

One of the rising issues during this time was the displacement of Afghans within Afghanistan. While many could not flee or chose to stay, they were still displaced due to internal conflict. Afghanistan's populations have historically divided around ethnic groups, with Hazara groups making up 9%, Tajiks making up 27%, and Pashtuns with 42%.¹²⁴ Because the battle was based around ethnic and religious delineations, most of the attacks were focused on cities and regions with large Hazara, Tajik and Pashtun groups as each faction attacked one another in their

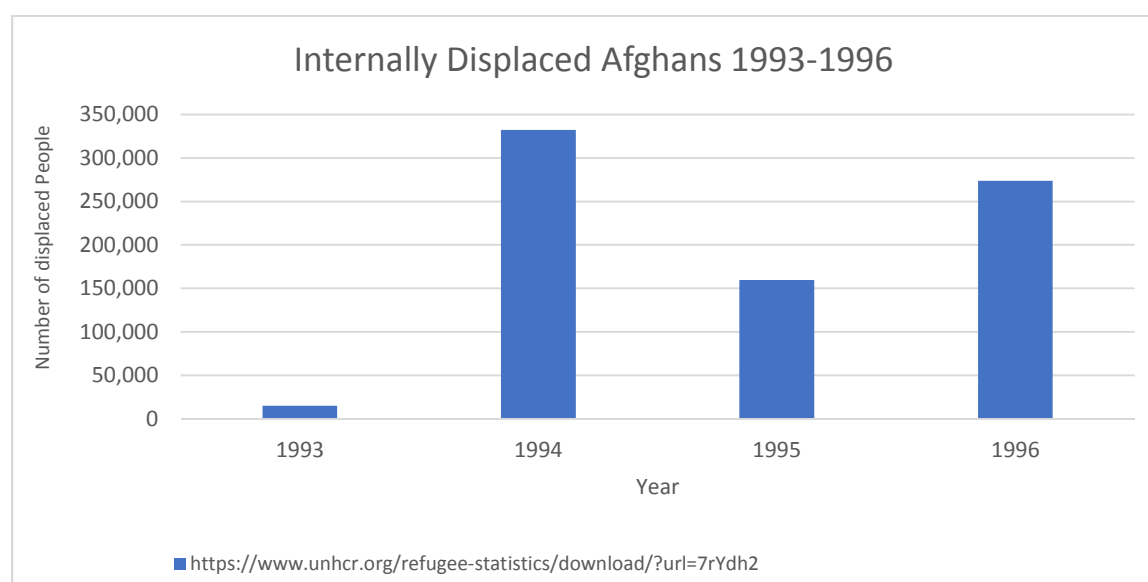
¹²² Garakani, "PLACE-MAKING IN THE MARGINS: A CASE STUDY OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN IRAN (1980-2001)." (p. 34)

¹²³ "UNHCR - Refugee Statistics - 1990-1996."

¹²⁴ "Afghanistan - World Directory of Minorities & Indigenous Peoples." Uzbek's make up 9%, Turkmen 3%, Baluchi 2% and other groups making up 8%.

home bases. Thus, Jalalabad and Kandahar, two areas with Pashtun majorities, were attacked first, then Panjshir Valley, made up of Tajiks, and Kabul consisting of a mix of all three major groups. These attacks resulted in the internal mass displacement of Afghans that ebbed and flowed throughout the civil war period. Displacement during this time began in 1993, as tensions increased in the shelling and rocketing of Kabul in early June, killing 10,000 Afghans and contributing to the relocation of hundreds of thousands from Kabul.

Figure 5¹²⁵



Iran 1990-1996

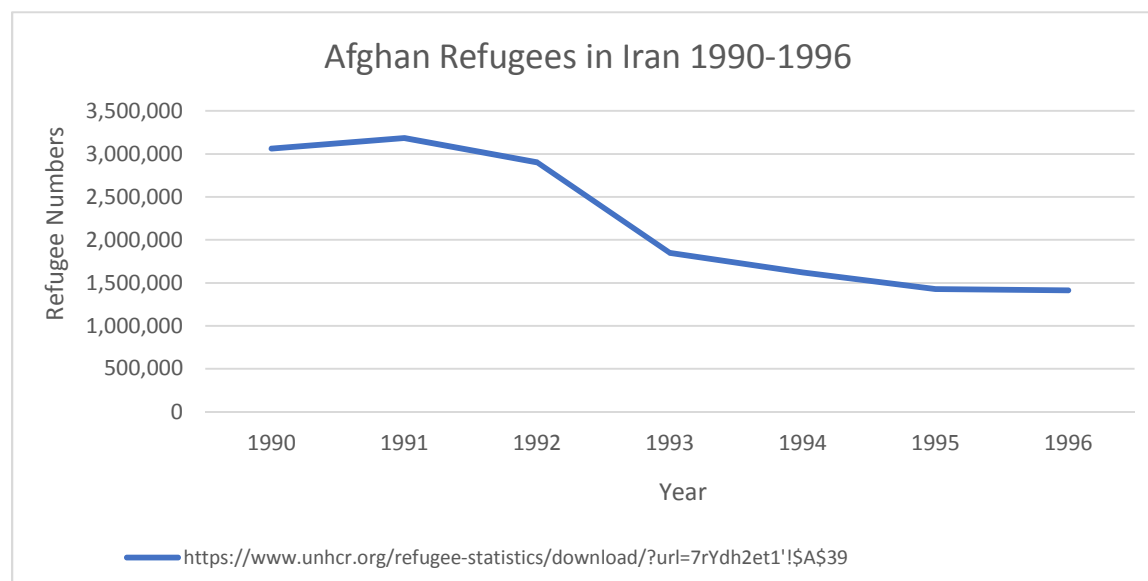
While Pakistan maintained its refugee population, almost half of the Afghan refugees in Iran voluntarily repatriated back to Afghanistan. By 1995, about 200,000 Afghans were repatriated with the assistance of the U.N.H.C.R., and another 200,000 returned spontaneously.¹²⁶ Some of these movements were due to Afghans' desire for return; in others, there was a significant effort by the Iranian government to repatriate Afghans. These initiatives

¹²⁵ "UNHCR - Refugee Statistics - 1990-1996."

¹²⁶ Colville, "UNHCR - Refugees Magazine Issue 108 (Afghanistan: The Unending Crisis) - The Biggest Caseload in the World."

involved revoking or limiting blue card distribution, banning Afghans living in provinces bordering Afghanistan, Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan, and limiting job opportunities.¹²⁷ These policies contributed to a harsh climate for Afghan refugees, pushing them to return.

Figure 6¹²⁸



United States

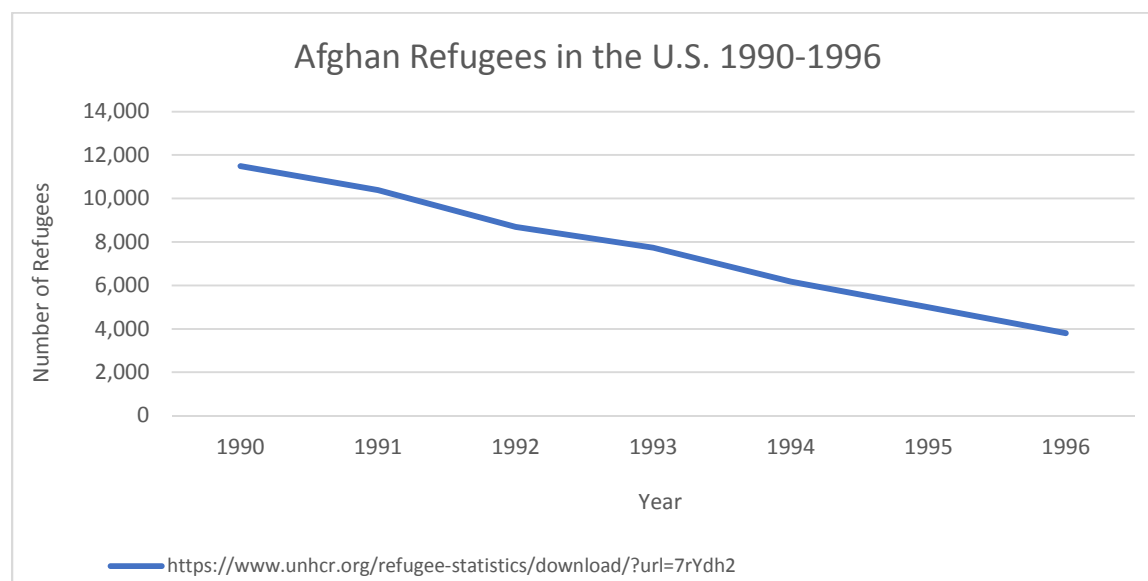
The United States began accepting Afghan refugees as their involvement ended during the Soviet invasion. While Massoud and other factions required assistance in rebuilding efforts, the United States reformed its foreign policy toward Afghanistan and maintained a distance. On the other hand, beginning in 1990, the United States began to accept Afghan refugees in the thousands. However, as conditions worsened in Afghanistan, the United States staggered its acceptance of refugees and instead provided further support to Pakistan, urging them to manage

¹²⁷ "Unwelcome Guests: Iran's Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights | HRW."

¹²⁸ "UNHCR - Refugee Statistics - 1990-1996."

the refugee crisis.¹²⁹ The United States decided to increase quotas by 1989 to accept more Soviet refugees. Therefore, the number of refugees from the Asian subcontinent increased from 1990-1993.¹³⁰ By 1996, the number of Afghan refugees dwindled to less than 4,0000, even though the United States received 80% of Afghan asylum applications in North America during 1990-1995 and 90% between 1993-1995.¹³¹

Figure 7 ¹³²



India

Meanwhile, India began its involvement in Afghanistan as a strategic response to Pakistan's ongoing relationship. As a result, in direct opposition to the Pakistan-backed Taliban, the Northern Alliance with General Abdul Rashid Dostum and Hazara Shiite anti-Taliban factions led by Abd-e-Rab Rasul Sayyaf were supported by Iran, India, and Russia. Still, the

¹²⁹ Siwach, "The U.S. Post -Cold War Diplomacy in South Asia." (p. 131-132)

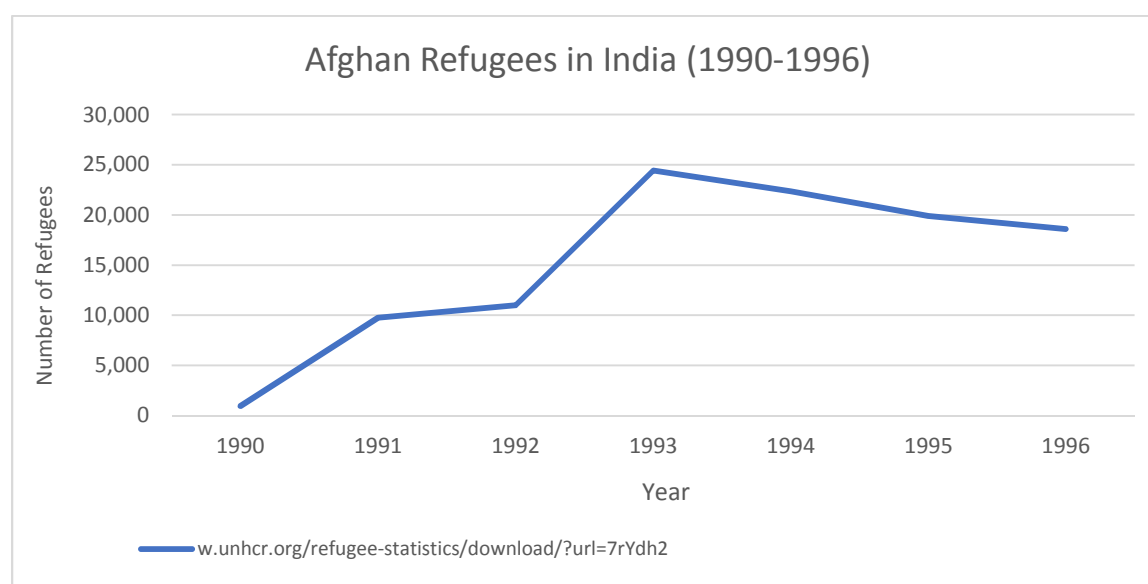
¹³⁰ Krogstad and Radford, "Key Facts about Refugees to the U.S." (p. 3)

¹³¹ "UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) CDR Background Paper on Refugees and Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan." The total number of applications was 674,000 during 1990-1995.

¹³² "UNHCR - Refugee Statistics - 1990-1996."

alliance failed because the Taliban prevailed.¹³³ Despite military setbacks, India continued its efforts in Afghanistan. The most significant involvement during the time was its acceptance of Afghan refugees. Rivaling the number taken in by the United States and other neighboring states, India's acceptance of Afghan refugees increased exponentially. Most of those seeking refuge in India were Afghans who were Sikh or Hindu. Their language and customs aligned with India's ethnic groups, easing their assimilation.¹³⁴

Figure 8 ¹³⁵



Afghan Refugee Asylum in Europe

From 1990 to 1995, 3.7 million applications for asylum were submitted to Europe (75%) and North America (25%). Germany received about 1.5 million applications, and the United States received nearly 674,000. Many of these countries upheld their promise as signatories to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, prompting Germany to take 93,000 refugees from the 1.5 million applicants, Canada to accept another 87,000 while France took in

¹³³ Jackson, "The Cost of War: Afghan Experiences of Conflict 1978-2009." (p. 12)

¹³⁴ Bose, "UNHCR - Afghan Refugees in India Become Indian, at Last."

¹³⁵ "UNHCR - Refugee Statistics - 1990-1996."

61,000 Afghan refugees. Furthermore, the acceptance rate of asylum and humanitarian status was at an all-time high, with 48% acceptance rates in countries like Sweden. Europe was committed to accepting Afghan refugees during this time. The countries that received the most asylum applications were Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and the United Kingdom, with 25% of these applicants receiving a favorable decision.¹³⁶

The End of Civil War, 1992-1996

The demographics of refugee populations remained consistent. Pashtuns were the dominant refugee groups in Pakistan, while Hazara, Tajik, and Uzbeks were the dominant refugee groups in Iran. From 1992-1996, Afghanistan did not have one true leader. Instead, each area was governed and led by one of the Mujahideen faction leaders. With an estimated 50,000 casualties during the four years of the civil war and the destruction of Kabul.¹³⁷ Despite years of fighting, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar could not establish his power any more than Burhanuddin Rabbani or Ahmad Shah Massoud. Each faction had enough support to wage war and maintain aggression. Still, neither section had much help from the people or foreign interests to take and manage the capital. As a result, while these factions fought amongst themselves, a new power emerged. And in the autumn of 1994, when Massoud took control of Kabul, the Taliban launched an offensive attack against Jalalabad and convinced leaders of Massoud's party to betray their loyalties to seize Kabul seamlessly. Forced to leave, Massoud's evacuation from Kabul on September 27, 1996, made way for a new era of Afghan governance.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ "UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) CDR Background Paper on Refugees and Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan."

¹³⁷ "1996 Human Rights Report: Afghanistan." Many people were imprisoned by both sides during the Civil war, some were killed, others were prisoners of war. Authorities forced people into exile, denied public and fair trials.

¹³⁸ Dorronsoro, "Kabul at War (1992-1996)." (p. 6-7).

Taliban 1996-2001

The political pendulum swung from socialism to theocracy in less than a decade in Afghanistan. The abrupt changes in political leadership and style indicated the unstable terrain of Afghan institutions as easily manipulated and prone to conflict. Many people had lost faith in the Mujahideen as thousands were abducted and disappeared, and lawlessness, bribery, theft, rape, and disorder were common during the civil war. The predominantly Pashtun, Sunni Islamic fundamentalist group emerged from the refugee camps in Pakistan as jihadi insurgencies aiming to reclaim Afghanistan from foreign influence and resolve the civil war tensions. These were the ills the Taliban vowed to address by punishing criminals, eliminating checkpoints, and enforcing strict rules based on Shari'a (Islamic law).¹³⁹

The Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Suppression of Vice, established by the Taliban, often beat, and executed men and women for acts ranging from listening to music to theft and adultery. Furthermore, the Taliban ignored and destroyed the gains made by women during the Soviet era in areas of education and work/professional development. Lastly, the Sunni group attempted ethnic cleansing of the Shi'ite Hazara groups in Afghanistan; by attacking mosques and Hazara-populated cities like Mazar-e-Sharif. Afghans faced grueling conditions with dwindling health services and a declining fragile economy.¹⁴⁰

Mullah Omar was the group's leader, and his Islamic initiatives eventually lost the support of Afghans. Nonetheless, they persisted, as their financial support from Pakistan and their friendship with Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden led to the formation of 10-18 different jihadi training camps in and around the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. With centers in Lahore,

¹³⁹ Jackson, "The Cost of War: Afghan Experiences of Conflict 1978-2009." (p. 11)

¹⁴⁰ Jackson. (p. 11-12)

Kunar, and Jalalabad that trained Moroccans and Algerians. Training included detonations, explosives, poisons, “clock bomb training,” and even chemical warfare.¹⁴¹ Although many of the larger camps were in these regions, most centers were near Kabul, as control of the capital was integral to their mission. In the end, between 1996-2001, the total number of Afghan refugees was between 3.1 million to 3.5 million, with the majority living in Pakistan and Iran.

Internal Displacement 1996-2001

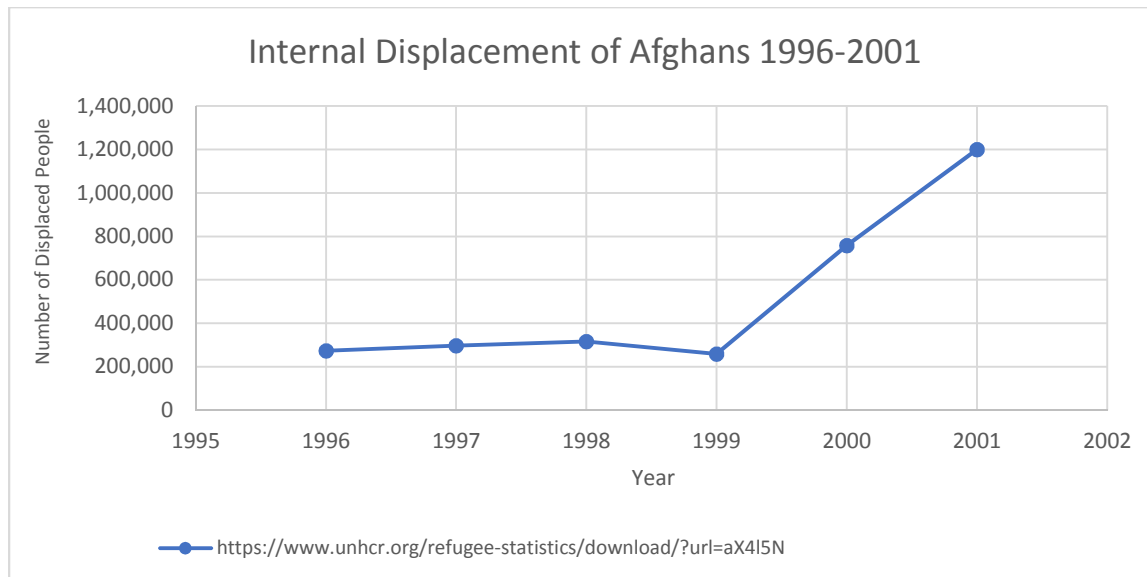
The Taliban’s intention to take all of Afghanistan resulted in further attacks on cities like Mazar, the Hindu Kush, and a more significant push toward capturing the North region of Panjsher, Massoud’s home base. However, in these endeavors, they left behind a trail of destruction. As Massoud continued to fight the Taliban, the number of casualties and displaced people rose. The number of Afghans tortured increased to 38% of those able to report abuses under the Taliban, and another 27% reported having their land and property damaged.¹⁴² Parwan, Bamiyan, Balkh, and Kabul were the areas with the most destruction and displacement, forcing these regions to seek refuge in neighboring provinces.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Maloney, “Army of Darkness.” (p. 522-523).

¹⁴² It was during this period that my family left, in 1999, as the Taliban tortured and held my uncle hostage. As a result, my family evacuated in the middle of the night and went to Uzbekistan.

¹⁴³ (p. 21-24).

Figure 9¹⁴⁴



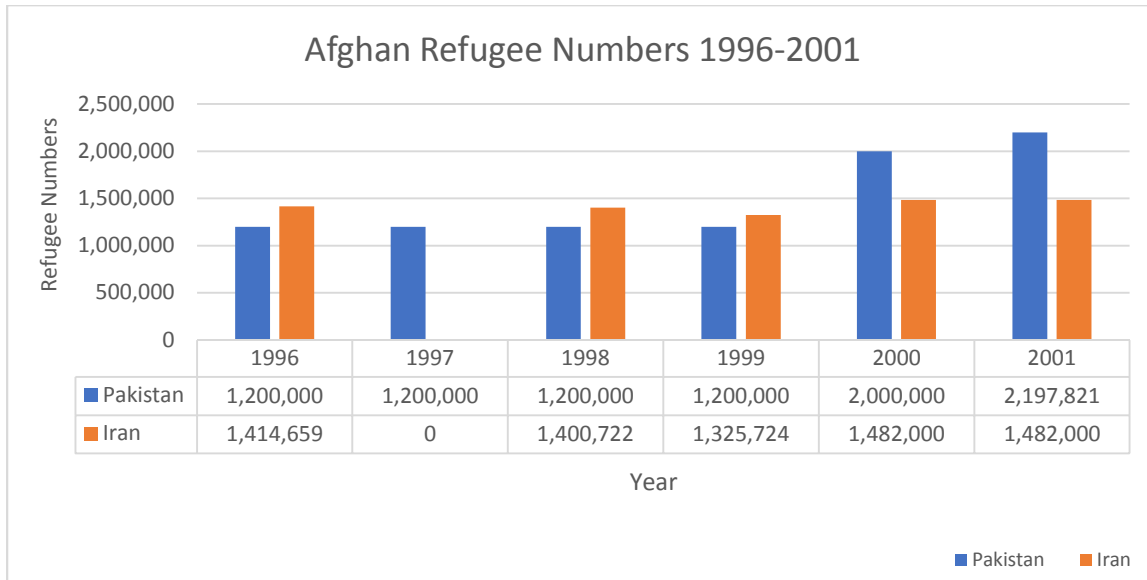
Pakistan and Iran 1996-2001

Pakistan's refugee numbers remained stagnant at 1.2 million; most Pashtun communities felt that the conditions in Afghanistan were well enough to return. While there was some migration back and forth, Pakistan's numbers remained the same. Meanwhile, the targeting of Taliban groups against minority communities like the Hazara led to Hazara groups staying in or migrating to Iran. Specifically, multiple attacks on the Hazara-populated city of Mazar-e-Sharif killed thousands in 1996-1997. Iran's supplying the city with resources and protection against the Hazara's staved-off attacks. However, in 1998, the Taliban attacked and conquered Mazar, killing 5-8,000 people. As a result, the number of Afghan refugees climbed as Hazara minorities urgently sought refuge in Iran.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ "UNHCR - Refugee Statistics 1996-2001."

¹⁴⁵ van de Goor and van Leeuwen, "The Netherlands and Afghanistan." (p. 34)

Figure 10¹⁴⁶



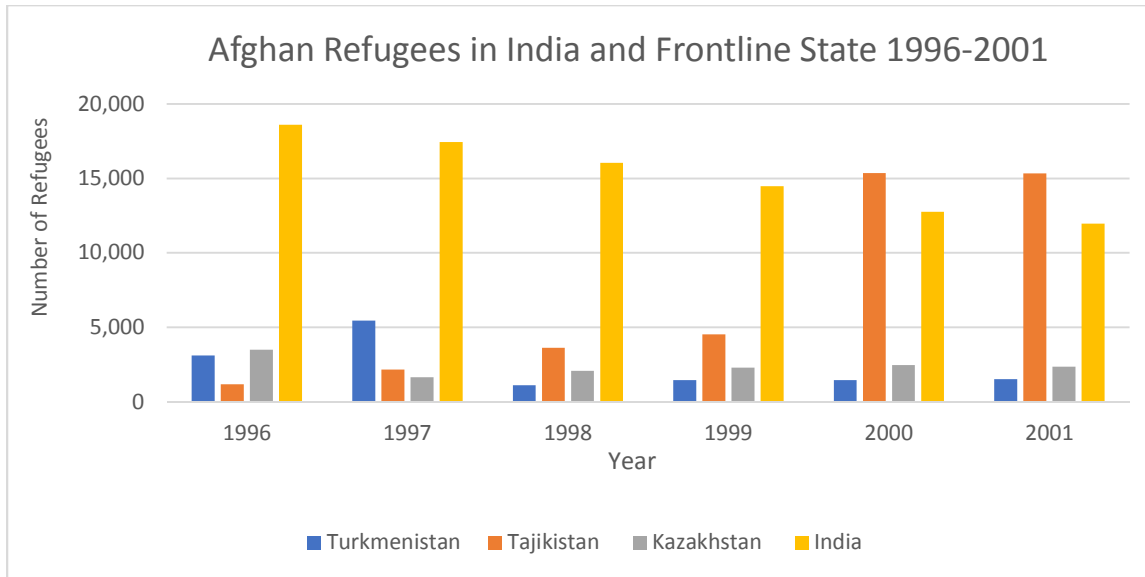
India and Frontline States 1996-2001

India and nearby “frontline” states such as Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan were beginning to open their borders as the Pakistan-backed Taliban proved to be a political rival for India and neighboring territories. The jihadi training camps were of great concern as nearby states feared the ramifications of militants training close to their borders. As a result, frontline states accepted refugees to relieve the refugee problems of Afghans.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ “UNHCR - Refugee Statistics 1996-2001.”

¹⁴⁷ Maloney, “Army of Darkness.” (p. 532-533)

Figure 11¹⁴⁸



Europe and North America 1996-2001

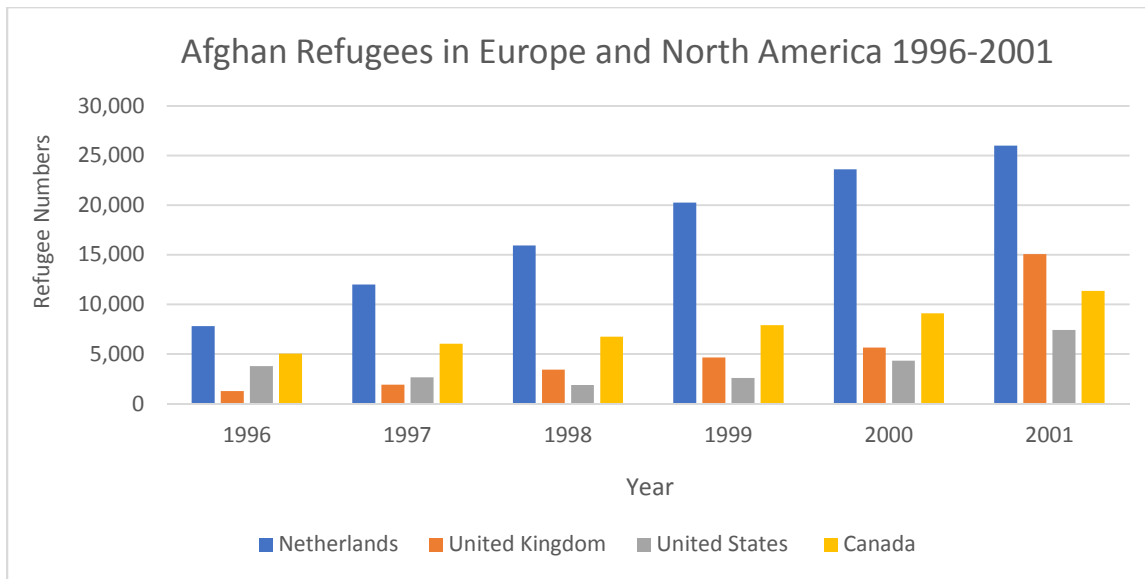
As conditions worsened under Taliban rule, Afghans sought refuge in neighboring countries and abroad. European countries like the Netherlands and the United Kingdom accepted the most Afghan asylum seekers from 1996 to 2001. Canada and the United States also received Afghan asylum seekers during this time. European and North American countries were accepting refugees from all over the world. Since Afghanistan's internal displacement was growing and their conditions were fragile, western nations began to accept Afghan refugees in limited numbers.^{149 150} Their interests stemmed from a redirection in foreign policy and resolved to extend their influence beyond Europe as a small country capable of third-world assistance. The Netherlands was explicitly invested in Afghanistan's peace-building and peace-keeping missions, funding over 150 projects to assist Afghans.

¹⁴⁸ "UNHCR - Refugee Statistics 1996-2001."

¹⁴⁹ Whitney, "Does the European Convention on Human Rights Protect Refugees from 'Safe' Countries?" (p. 406)

¹⁵⁰ van de Goor and van Leeuwen, "The Netherlands and Afghanistan." (p. 64-67)

Figure 12¹⁵¹



The U.S. Invasion 2001-2021

The Taliban gained about 80-90% of Afghanistan by 2001, their training camps were operating in full force, and their allies in Saudi Arabia and networks with Al-Qaeda were growing stronger with each conquest of new territory. However, the Taliban's fragile relationship with the West faced a more significant threat than ever on September 11, 2001. Osama bin Laden led Al-Qaeda's attack on the twin towers of New York City and shifted the United States' ambivalent relationship with the Taliban. The United States asked the Taliban to turn bin Laden over to them and refused to host the terrorist leader within the borders of Afghanistan. Because the Taliban did not comply immediately and chose to host and protect the leader, the U.S. invaded in October of 2001 with the support of the United Kingdom.¹⁵²

The total number of Afghan civilians, Afghan military, and opposition fighters that have died in Afghanistan in the 20-year war has been 176,000, with 46,319 Afghans, 69,095 Afghan

¹⁵¹ "UNHCR - Refugee Statistics 1996-2001."

¹⁵² Smith and Thorp, "The Legal Basis for the Invasion of Afghanistan." (p. 3-4).

armed forces and police, 52,893 opposition fighters (Taliban), or hostile combatants, with 2015-2016 being the deadliest years. The United States, along with the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, France, and Germany, spent billion in military and contracts attempting to build the Afghan state. With four U.S. presidents, two Afghan Presidents, and the declaration of the Global War on Terror alongside “Operation Enduring Freedom” (OEF), the United States began two decades of airstrikes and drone strikes that totaled \$2.313 trillion by 2021.¹⁵³ There are three distinct periods in Afghan refugee migration during the two-decade war: 2001-2008, 2009-2016, and 2016-2021.

Internally Displaced Afghans, 2001-2008

Initially, the United States began heavy bombing of training camps and attacked Taliban strongholds in Bamiyan, Herat, Kabul, and Jalalabad, causing insecurity, but pushing Taliban forces out. With the ex-communication of the Taliban and their leader Mullah Omar, the United States backed Hamid Karzai and set up an interim Government. In this installation process, the U.S. government attempts to rebuild Afghanistan by allocating \$38 billion from 2001-2009.¹⁵⁴ With the fall of the Taliban in 2002, over 1.2 million Afghans voluntarily repatriated from Pakistan and Iran in the most extensive repatriation effort of the U.N.H.C.R.¹⁵⁵ However, as the U.N.H.C.R. lacked funding, most of the repatriated Afghans added to the internally displaced numbers, signifying 2002 as a year with the highest number of displacements. Therefore, the conditions in Afghanistan improved toward the end of the decade.¹⁵⁶

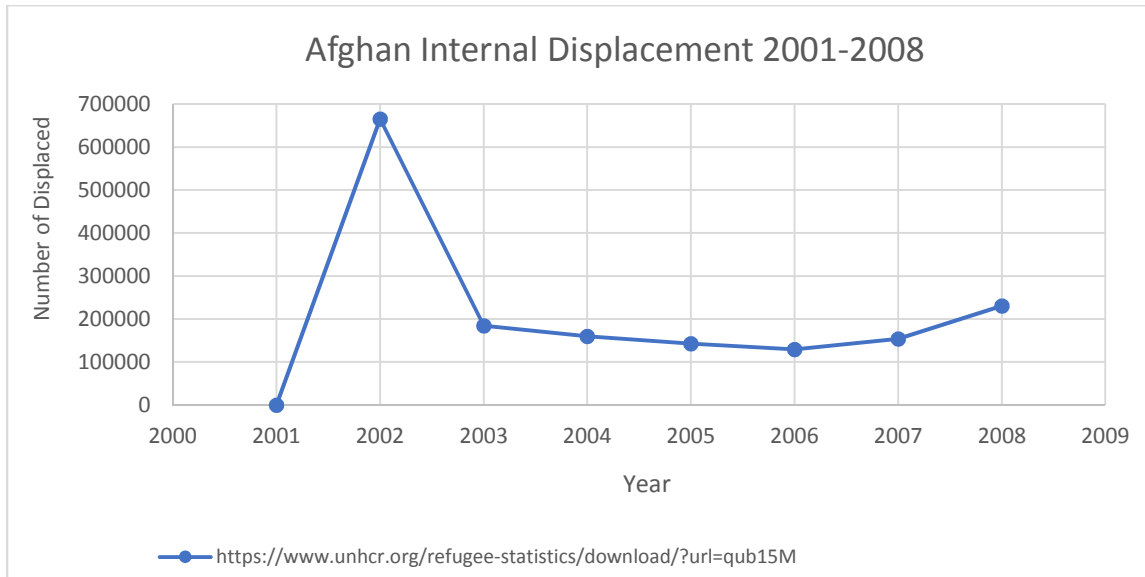
¹⁵³ “Human and Budgetary Costs to Date of the U.S. War in Afghanistan, 2001-2022 | Figures | Costs of War.”

¹⁵⁴ “The U.S. War in Afghanistan | Council on Foreign Relations,” accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan>.

¹⁵⁵ Kessler, “UNHCR - Afghan Repatriation from Pakistan Triples Original 2002 Estimates as Returns Pass 1.2 million.”

¹⁵⁶ Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*. (p. 256)

Figure 13¹⁵⁷



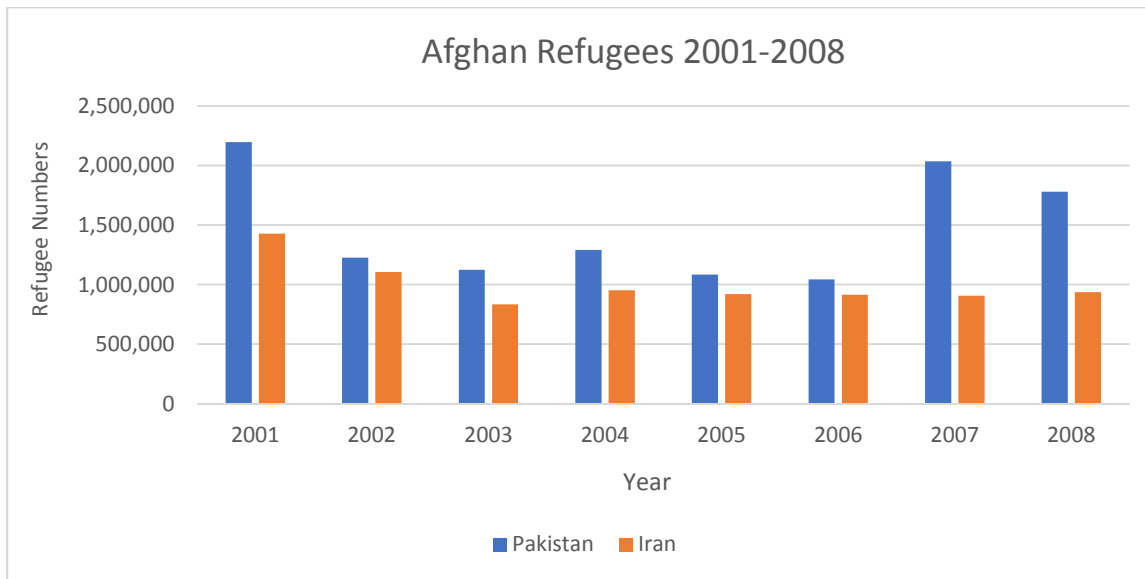
Afghan Refugees in Pakistan and Iran 2001-2008

U.N.H.C.R. initiatives alongside NATO efforts to stabilize Afghanistan contributed to high levels of repatriation and a sharp decline in Afghan-seeking refugees in Pakistan and Iran between 2002-2006. Meanwhile, with renewed vigor, Taliban forces began a new wave of attacks in 2005, with attacks on girls’ schools and suicide bombings contributing to another spike in refugee flights to Pakistan and Iran.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ “UNHCR - Refugee Statistics 2001-2008.”

¹⁵⁸ Gossman, “How US-Funded Abuses Led to Failure in Afghanistan | Human Rights Watch.”

Figure 13¹⁵⁹



Afghan Refugees in North America 2001-2008

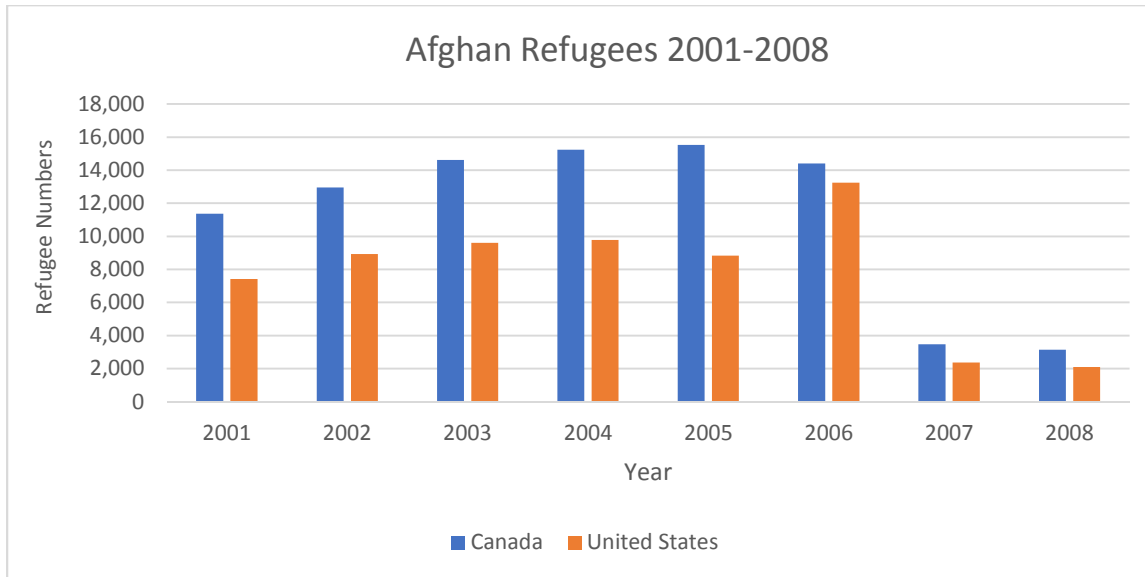
The more the United States and Canada spent on aid and military assistance, the greater the Bush administration’s belief in a stable Afghanistan, as funding came with increases in military aid and soldiers on the ground.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, U.S. relations with President Karzai began to sour as NATO forces criticized the Afghan government for not protecting aid workers. At the same time, a U.S. gunship killed dozens of Afghan civilians in 2008, drawing President Karzai’s condemnation. These instances set the scene for refugee acceptance rates during the time, as political issues influence the decline of refugee acceptance rates by the end of 2007 and 2008.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ “UNHCR - Refugee Statistics 2001-2008.”

¹⁶⁰ Gregg II, “George W. Bush: Foreign Affairs | Miller Center.”

¹⁶¹ “The U.S. War in Afghanistan | Council on Foreign Relations.”

Figure 14¹⁶²



Internal Displacement 2009-2016

Barack Obama’s historic election in 2008 was a new and hopeful era in the political landscape of the United States. President Obama’s efforts and support for the Afghan people were an encouraging and welcome change to the discourse in foreign policy. However, President Obama’s commitment to destroying Al-Qaeda’s safe havens led to his efforts in sending an additional 17,000 troops in February of 2009 and another 4,000 troops in March, totaling 60-68,000 by August 2009. With 540 airstrikes during his entire presidency, and an estimated death toll of 3,797 people, including 324 civilians, Afghan displacement increased within its borders and forced many to seek refuge once again.¹⁶³ As funding for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) decreased in 2014, suicide bombs and targeted attacks on specific areas by the Taliban increased, security issues began to weaken, and civilian death and injuries rose exponentially by the end of 2016.

¹⁶² “UNHCR - Refugee Statistics 2001-2008.” 2003 was the year my family immigrated to the U.S. from a neighboring country, as the prospect of immigration was more viable than the opportunity to return.

¹⁶³ Zenko, “Obama’s Final Drone Strike Data | Council on Foreign Relations.”

Figure 15 ¹⁶⁴

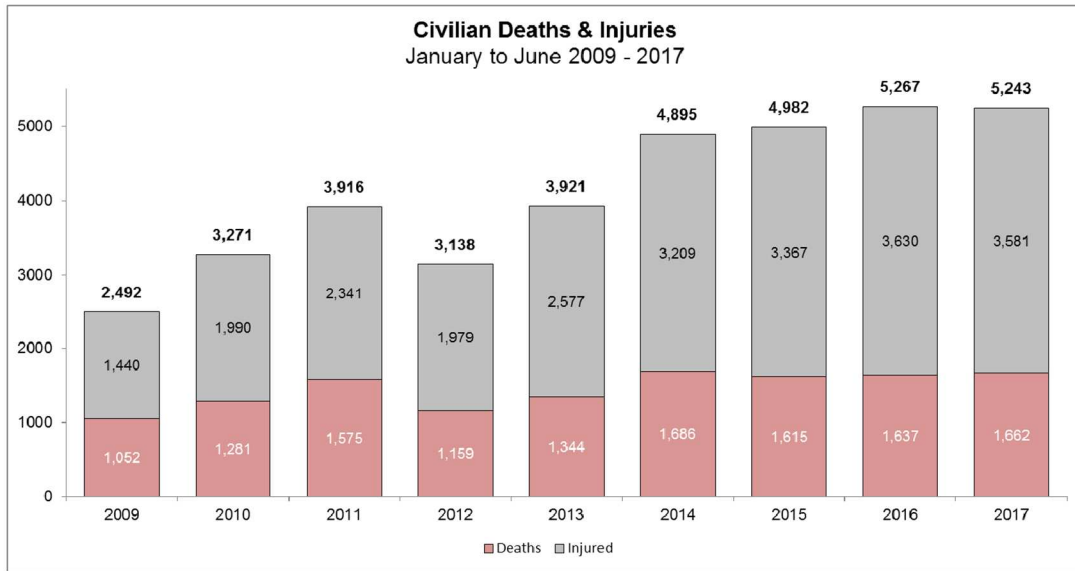
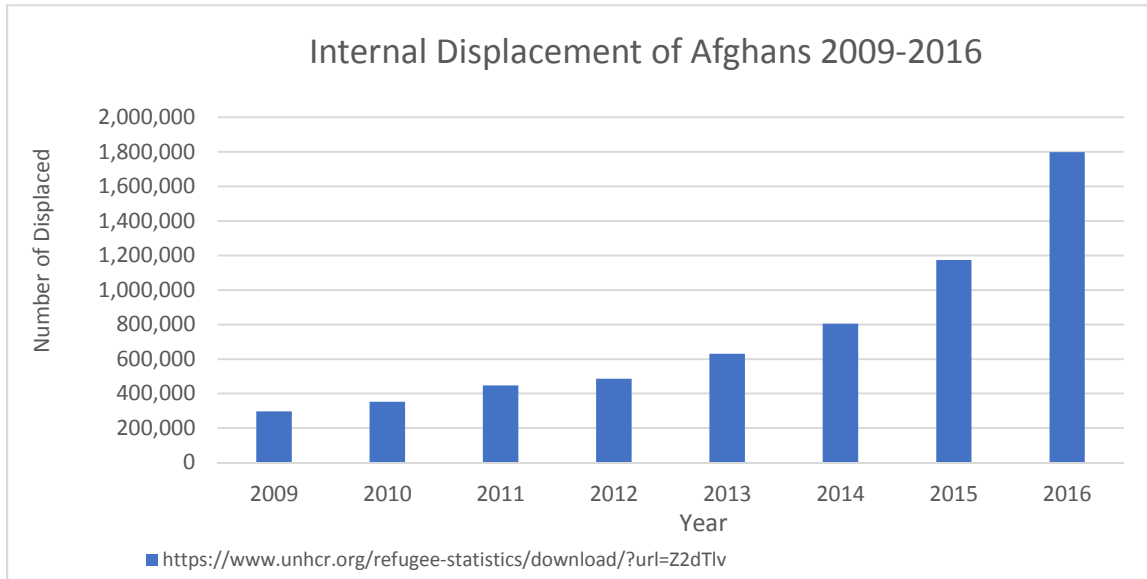


Figure 16 ¹⁶⁵



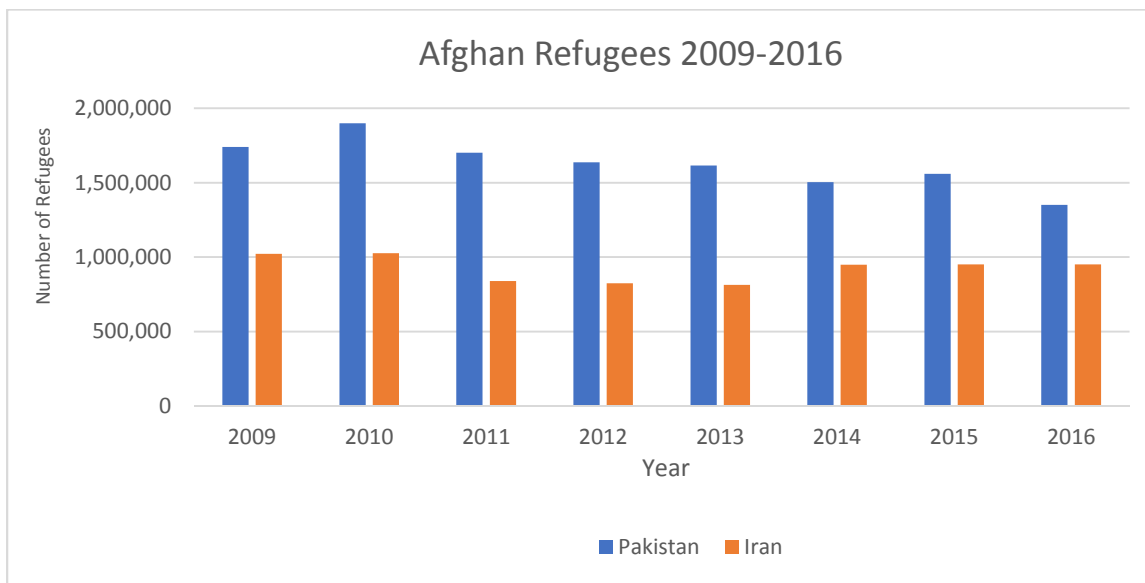
¹⁶⁴ "Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict."

¹⁶⁵ "UNHCR - Refugee Statistics 2009-2016."

Pakistan and Iran, 2009-2016

Pakistan and Iran began to forcefully remove Afghans by employing methods of political and social exclusion, banning blue cards, refusing property ownership, and in the case of Iran, encouraging flows of Afghan refugees further beyond Turkey and elsewhere. As a result, Pakistan and Iran decreased their refugee numbers by the end of Obama’s presidency, despite continued instability.¹⁶⁶ Both Pakistan and Iran were struggling economically as the 2008 crash impacted western nations and those in the MENA region. As a result, harboring refugees with dwindling sources of assistance became increasingly trick after decades of providing a haven.

Figure 17¹⁶⁷



Europe and North America 2009-2016

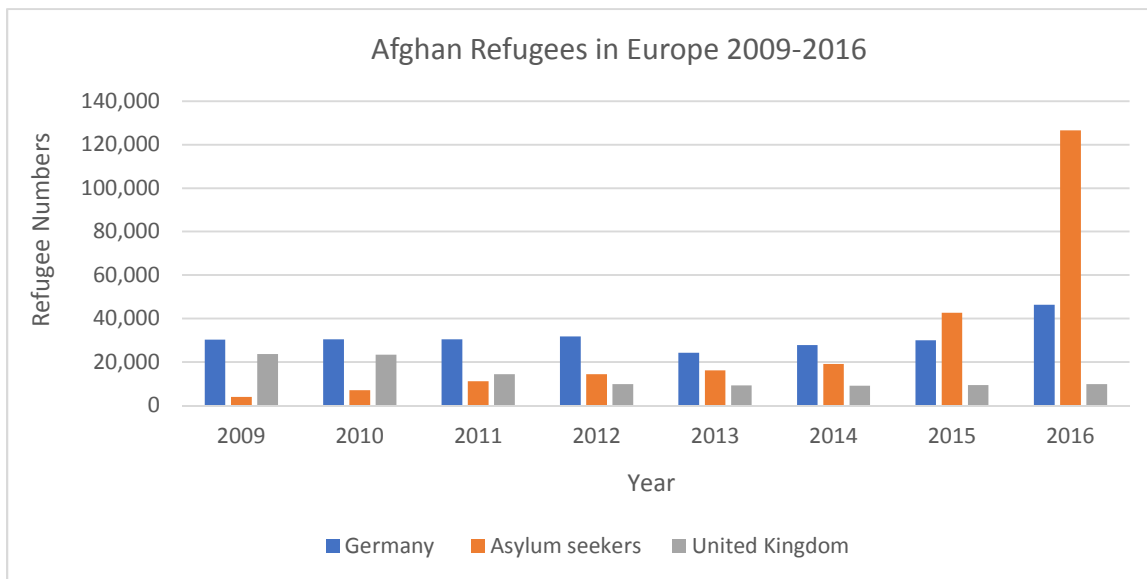
The United States and Canada significantly decreased their Afghan refugee numbers to below two thousand during this period. Meanwhile, European countries take in large numbers of Afghans as tensions between the Taliban and the Afghan government escalated. The Afghan

¹⁶⁶ Tronc and Nahikian, “Fragile Futures: The Human Cost of Conflict in Afghanistan.” (p. 19-20)

¹⁶⁷ “UNHCR - Refugee Statistics 2009-2016.”

government faced issues concerning corruption, failing military support structures, and security concerns leading to control of only 56% of the country. Meanwhile, the Taliban were gaining supporters because rural people resented the reforms from Kabul and were facing grave economic conditions. Kabul’s inability to protect the Afghan people was exposed throughout 2015-2016, as volatility between the government and Taliban forces led to clashes that resulted in casualty rates reminiscent of the Soviet era. Furthermore, this period coincided with the Syrian conflict, opening global migration pathways to Europe.¹⁶⁸

Figure 18¹⁶⁹



Trump Presidency and Afghan Refugees 2016-2020

President Trump’s presidency brought a significant shift in refugee and immigration policy, alongside major downsizing of U.S.C.I.S. Trump’s outlook in Afghanistan was to continue and forge ahead with military plans. According to the United States Force Central Command, the Trump Presidency concluded with 24,597 Sorties with at least one weapon

¹⁶⁸ “The U.S. War in Afghanistan | Council on Foreign Relations.” Tronc and Nahikian, “Fragile Futures: The Human Cost of Conflict in Afghanistan.”

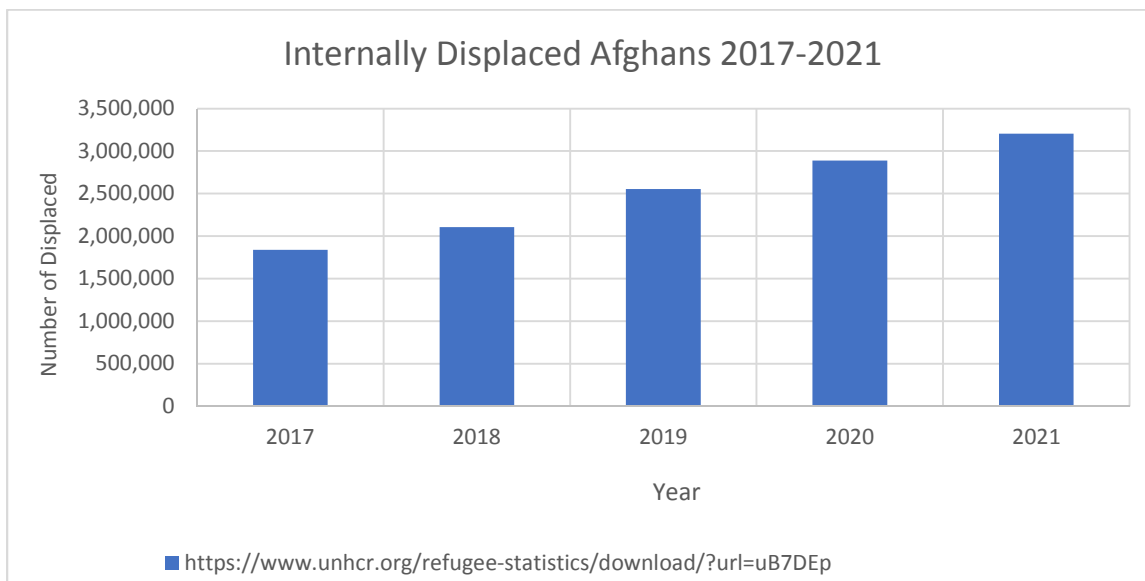
¹⁶⁹ “UNHCR - Refugee Statistics 2009-2016.”

release. Sorties are aerial attacks made by the U.S. for defense purposes, commonly known as “air strikes.”¹⁷⁰ These air strikes were catastrophic to Afghans as most strikes did not reach their intended targets with mistakes resulting in an increase of 31% in civilian casualties in 2018. Such instances heightened tensions between American forces and Afghan civilians, driving dissent in Afghan politics, with many growing weary of the nearly two decades of American occupation.¹⁷¹

Internally Displaced Afghans 2017-2021

The Taliban made new gains during this period, which initiated large-scale attacks by the U.S. and Afghan government forces. As a result, 2016-2022 was a deadly time, as 40% of attacks landed on civilians, killing almost 1,600 children. As a result, these attacks led to the mass displacement of Afghans from their homes.¹⁷²

Figure 19¹⁷³



¹⁷⁰ “November 2021 Airpower Summary_FINAL.Pdf.”

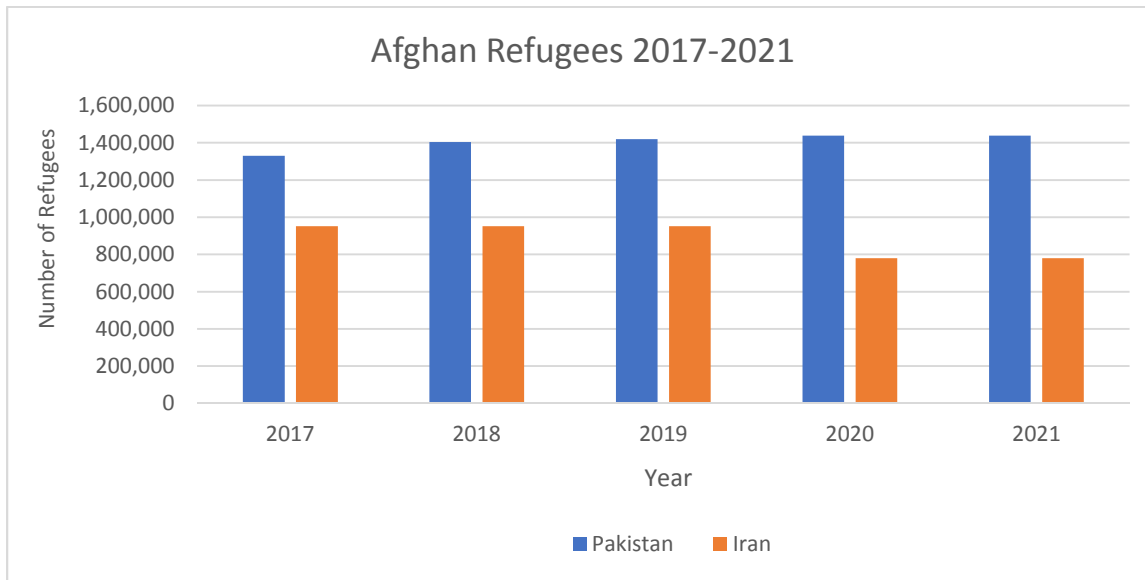
¹⁷¹ “Dozens Killed as US-Backed Strike Hits Afghan Wedding | News | DW | 23.09.2019.”

¹⁷² Gossman, “How US-Funded Abuses Led to Failure in Afghanistan | Human Rights Watch.”

¹⁷³ “Refugee Statistics- 2017-2021.”

Pakistan and Iran 2017-2021

Figure 20¹⁷⁴



North America and Europe 2017-2021

Chapter 4 describes the data available for refugees leaving post-2021 and seeking asylum in the United States, as the numbers are staggering. However, before 2021, Canada and the United States did not accept more than three thousand refugees. Meanwhile, Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, Greece, Turkey, Sweden, and Italy, took Afghan refugees in the thousands, with Germany accepting most Afghan refugees.

Conclusion

Afghan refugees are overlooked and ignored in the more extensive global refugee system despite their ongoing security issues and consistent patterns of migration flows. This assertion reveals the persistent problems of Afghans since the Soviet invasion. Despite the casualty rates, the decades of conflict, and the high number of internal and external attacks, the world's attention has been minimal. Casualty rates and increased attacks have not resulted in greater acceptance of

¹⁷⁴ "Refugee Statistics- 2017-2021."

refugees in western nations. Instead, neighboring countries have passively and begrudgingly accepted Afghan refugees, only with the condition of international aid. As a result, the temporary and conditional acceptance of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran has contributed to early repatriation efforts that have only displaced people internally.

The intake of Afghan refugees, in addition to better infrastructural and state-planning efforts, is inconsistent with the level of western military domination. The paradox is most present in the extent of the presence of the United States government and its two decades of occupation in Afghanistan, culminating in hundreds of thousands of air strikes, military attacks, and civilian deaths versus the number of refugees the country evacuated and accepted. The stark discrepancies in political and military involvement compared to humanitarian assistance and refugee acceptance reveals the intentions of western nations as imperialists, concerned only with their interests. These arguments follow the facts and statistics presented in this chapter.

Afghanistan faces significant security issues driven by the interests of foreign entities concerned with pushing their agendas at the expense of Afghans. Between the Cold War and the War on Terror, Afghanistan is a playground for proxy wars and western grandstanding.

Lastly, the migratory patterns of Afghan refugees fluctuate as their socio-political conditions change. As each period of instability pushes Afghan refugees to seek refuge in Iran or Pakistan, they become conditioned to expect uncertainty, often anticipating moving before major shifts occur, as is evident before the civil war, the first Taliban takeover, and the U.S. invasion. In this anticipation, Afghans find comfort in places similar to their upbringing. Therefore, they follow the culture and religion of the nearest neighboring country that can provide avenues of support and community. As a result, Pakistan holds most of the Pashtun ethnic groups, while the Shiite Hazara groups and the Tajik minorities are protected in Iran. Afghan refugee decision-

making is partly based on familiarity with the region; the rest depends on their perception of survival and security, resulting in journeys beyond neighboring Pakistan and Iran. However, this is an overly simplistic explanation as Afghan refugees have disrupted these patterns with Pashtun's migrating to Iran and Tajiks and Hazara's living in Pakistan; these decisions prompted economic opportunity, safety, and community/family connections.

Chapter III – Responsible Parties and Resettlement

Introduction

The global refugee crisis is at the intersection of state sovereignty and international responsibility, primarily because the UNHCR is a worldwide institution providing help and relief to millions of displaced people annually with the support and guidance of sovereign nations. Response and responsibility are critical duties of the UNHCR, the international system supported and funded by sovereign states, to provide aid and assistance to the world's displaced populations. This chapter examines the responsible parties in addressing the global refugee crisis, specifically the ongoing refugee crisis of Afghans in the last half-century.¹⁷⁵

Since the inception of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the duties of the UNHCR have been to provide emergency aid and advocacy to millions of refugees. Examining the Convention, the significance of the 1967 protocol, the formation of the UNHCR, its history, and its evolution are critical in setting the foundations of the refugee regime. Furthermore, these foundational documents reveal the basis of the refugee system and identify the gaps present. Next, neighboring states such as Pakistan and Iran are critical actors in addressing the displacement of Afghans during each wave of their departure. Evaluating the role of these states in bearing responsibility and assuming the burden of refugee intake is essential, even as they alleviate the displacement of millions of Afghans and contribute to the ensuing instability of the Afghan state.

Assigning accountability involves thoroughly examining international organizations and their ties to the UNHCR and subsequent affiliations to local organizations, a crucial factor in determining responsibility. These operations that extend from the global systems encompass the

¹⁷⁵ The responsible party to the refugee crisis of the world is the UNHCR, receiving states and front-line states have some duties under international law, but are not beholden to the same standards as the UNHCR. NGOs are not duty-bound, but they are beholden to their mission and donors.

totality of the refugee system's process networks and their impact on the system. Furthermore, NGOs with specific missions in refugee assistance are the most important to examine, specifically the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Amnesty International, International Organization for Migration (IOM), and others. Their work is inextricable from that of the UNHCR. Therefore, their relationship with each other and their responses are related to grassroots operations in communities of refugees. Concerning local operations, this chapter will also examine the groundwork of a local organization in a country with a high Afghan refugee population, Turkey, specifically, the Afghanistan Hazaras Culture and Solidarity Association (AHCSA) in Istanbul.¹⁷⁶ This organization provides aid and resources to displaced people unable or disconnected from the international systems' avenues of refugee assistance.

Lastly, this chapter examines the influence of states on the international refugee system. Both monetarily and politically, states with the most power that contributed to the refugee crisis are not the same states with large refugee populations. Therefore, the literature will present the contradictory relationship between states with influence versus states with large refugee populations. These two types of states converge only in monetary and financial policies but diverge in their responses to refugee responsibility. Thus, the discrepancies in states with influence over those with large refugee populations present gaps in the responsibility paradigm. Gaps are even "more" apparent in the intake and resettlement process of "donor" states, whose contribution is almost entirely monetary, hindering the flow of refugees and contributing to bottlenecks that culminate in strained relations.

¹⁷⁶ The AHCSA is an organization in Istanbul, one that I was able to interview and meet with via zoom and phone calls during my time in Istanbul. Conversations with their organization were helpful in describing the issues that refugees are facing in Istanbul as they are having trouble obtaining resources from the larger organizations. <https://turkiyemultecikonsevi.org/EN/ahcsa>

Terms and Key Ideas

The term refugee is defined within the 1951 Refugee Convention. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as a person who,

“...owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such a fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”¹⁷⁷

Another key idea is the responsibility to protect, which emerged following the atrocities committed in 1990 in the Balkans and Rwanda when the state and the international community failed to protect and prevent human rights violations. As a result, the challenge is to protect those who suffer from human rights violations and offend the sovereignty and precepts of common humanity taken on by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). The ICISS and the Canadian government” issued a report entitled “The Responsibility to Protect,” outlining the role of states in the refugee system. The information conveyed the importance of state sovereignty and population welfare while highlighting the value of states assisting other states. The “residual responsibility” of the broader community of states is to protect vulnerable people in other states when the hosting state itself is unwilling or unable to fulfill its responsibility to protect.¹⁷⁸ As a result, the responsibility to safeguard reports

¹⁷⁷ UN General Assembly, “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.”

¹⁷⁸ “United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect.”

established a critical norm within the international system that recognizes the imperative of all states to work together and protect the most vulnerable.

Burden sharing is another term relevant to the refugee crisis. Burden-sharing is most pertinent to the North Atlantic Trading Organization (NATO). Western nations founded NATO to provide collective security to one another and provide protection; these protections came with the equitable dispersal of duties. Specifically, the distribution of “responsibilities included burden sharing as it relates to “...countries pulling their weight internationally... taking on board contributions to other international public goods – financing E.U. enlargement, aiding the Third” World, reducing emissions of climate-damaging pollutants.”¹⁷⁹ The proportional division of responsibilities and sharing the burden of providing public goods is a crucial feature of NATO. Furthermore, these capabilities ultimately involved sharing the costs of achieving common objectives that instill international norms and persuade national governments to act according to international standards. Thus, European countries and the U.S. are prime examples of states with such capabilities.

More specifically, the international system recognizes the duties that states have to provide aid and assistance to those undergoing violations of human rights and the commitment to provide public goods while sharing the burden of protecting those beyond their borders. Therefore, burden sharing in the refugee regime assumes that by relieving key issues such as providing aid, assistance, and resettlement options for refugees, there would be an overall reduction of inequality among regions. Such an agreement was critical because “In refugee matters, the logic of burden-sharing starts from the premise that helping refugees is a joint

¹⁷⁹ Chalmers, “The Atlantic Burden-Sharing Debate-Widening or Fragmenting?”

internationally held moral duty and obligation in the system's international law."¹⁸⁰ Despite the international system's agreement on burden-sharing, the praxis of this notion translates to a disproportionate response between nations in the global north versus those in the global south. Because cooperation has not transformed into an agreed formula for an even distribution of refugee admittance, there are many discrepancies in the refugee resettlement and aid system.

For example, in the global system, burden sharing depends upon the collective monetary assistance of donor states, NGOs, and the UNHCR. Donor states often drive refugee policy, as their financial contributions to the international refugee system and their geographic distance remove them from hosting displaced people. Consequently, donor states establish agencies and organizations that shape refugee policy while providing monetary support to maintain refugee camps and assist in repatriation efforts. Ultimately, the financial aid of donor states bolsters weak states' economic conditions while shirking and shifting the burden of refugee acceptance.¹⁸¹

Financial aid often involves donating to international institutions like the United Nations, NATO, the World Bank (W.B.), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the E.U., World Trade Organization (WTO). These institutions have aid programs and loan systems that disperse funds to regions struggling with financial issues. Furthermore, within the budgets of the E.U. and the United States, separate funds are earmarked for refugee/asylum issues. Beginning in the late 90s, the E.U. initiated a refugee fund to allocate funds to those countries receiving refugees. The E.U., therefore, can defray the cost of hosting displaced persons while sharing in the burden of providing relief and skirting the overall responsibility of accepting large numbers of

¹⁸⁰ Surke, "Burden-Sharing during Refugee Emergencies: The Logic of Collective versus National Action." (p. 399)

¹⁸¹ Uçarer, "Burden-Shirking, Burden-Shifting, and Burden-Sharing in the Emergent European Asylum Regime." (p. 225)

refugees/asylum seekers.¹⁸² Similarly, the establishment of the U.S. Bureau for population, refugees, and migration (PRM) in 1993, has manifested into the U.S. agency contributing the most to the UNHCR.¹⁸³ ¹⁸⁴ Consequently, the shift in responsibility of the E.U. and the U.S. stems from the evolution of the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention.

The 1951 Refugee Convention

The years leading up to the 1951 Refugee Convention reveal a skewed history of international affairs that heavily favored western interests and European colonial rule. Due to the centralization of political power and the desire for hegemony, the global system revolved around western issues and states. Because Europe was the central focus of the international community in the aftermath of the Balkan wars, World War I, World War II, and other conflicts, a resolution to the displacement of Europeans was the primary concern of these states. The plan to address the displaced populations began to take shape during tumultuous times. However, the fears grew when hundreds of thousands of Europeans faced displacement at the height of the Cold War.¹⁸⁵ The perils of displaced populations and the aftermath of weaker states vulnerable to the influence of communism were the catalyst for western states to intervene and introduce a more substantial body of world governance capable of addressing and alleviating displaced peoples.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Uçarer. (p. 235-6)

¹⁸³ Richard, "US Diplomacy on Refugees and Migrants." (p. 42)

¹⁸⁴ "About the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration." The PRM is a functional bureau within the U.S. State Department, they provide protection, ease suffering, and resolve the plight of persecuted and uprooted people around the world on behalf of the American people by providing life-sustaining assistance, working with global partners, promoting best-practices of humanitarian response and ensuring that humanitarian principles are integrated into U.S. foreign and national security policy. The PRM works with 130 civil service and foreign service staff. They provide funds directly to the U.N. and NGO's that operates refugee camps and the Bureau monitors their work.

¹⁸⁵ Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*. (p. 107).

¹⁸⁶ Surke, "Burden-Sharing during Refugee Emergencies: The Logic of Collective versus National Action." (p. 404) The resettlement efforts were strictly European or Western affair in that it involved the movement of Europeans in the aftermath of a European-initiated war to other European countries.

The United States was a leader at this moment by reshaping the refugee agencies and putting an end to US-Soviet cooperation, resulting in the termination of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA).¹⁸⁷ In its place, the U.S. and the international system created the International Refugee Organization (IRO) in 1946. This agency extended its work to include victims of Nazism, Fascism, Spanish Republicans, and ‘other pre-war exiles.’ Their primary purpose was to resettle and solve the issue quickly. As a result, once the IRO’s mission was near completion, the international order had a new concern for future displaced individuals. As questions of state sovereignty and maneuverability came to light, the idea of a global bureaucracy mandating state actions towards refugees became increasingly unpopular. On the other hand, a “blank cheque” system, whereby unconditional military and political support, also posed issues because there was little agency or design to streamline future matters.¹⁸⁸

Critical to the record was the status of refugees, tackling the present and future refugee displacement in Europe. To resolve concerns and provide structural support for future displaced communities, the United Nations Economic and Social Council came to a compromise in December of 1950, with the assistance of the U.N. General Assembly, and created the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).¹⁸⁹ The UNHCR’s geographical focus was to assist those in Europe; over time, it extended its protections to include those affected in every part of the world by adding the 1967 Protocol and codifying the U.N. The 1951 Refugee Convention is a document signed and agreed upon by most nations. This document followed the

¹⁸⁷ Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*. (p. 107) The UNRRA was created at a 44-nation conference at the White House on November 9, 1943. Its mission was to provide economic assistance to European nations after WWII and to repatriate and assist refugees who would come under Allied control. The U.S. funded nearly half of their budget. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/united-nations-relief-and-rehabilitation-administration>

¹⁸⁸ Gatrell. (p. 108)

¹⁸⁹ Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Refugees and Forced Migration Studies*. (p. 588).

adoption and ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Genocide Convention (1948).¹⁹⁰

Essential to the foundation of the 1951 Convention were the parameters that defined the term ‘refugee.’ The Convention defined ‘refugee’ within a limited scope that set a strict framework and timeline associated with the status of refugees. Additionally, the Convention considered additional circumstances to restrict the group of refugees. Therefore, those who had committed crimes were ineligible to be refugees, and displaced people struggling financially were also absolved from seeking asylum or refuge.¹⁹¹ The 1951 Refugee Convention restrictions came at the heels of international principles that widened the scope for those who did fit the defined status of ‘refugee.’ The principles included nonrefoulement, protection, and international responsibility-sharing within the structure of an established global agency (UNHCR) which streamlined the support and services necessary to provide relief. One of the most fundamental principles of the Convention is non-refoulement, “...that no refugee shall be returned in any manner whatsoever to a country where he or she would be at risk of persecution.” The protections provided for those able to claim refugee status have been the baseline of the refugee system, as these principles guide and tie sovereign states to provide a response and share the responsibility for the global refugee crises.¹⁹²

Central to refugee care is the refugees’ protection from being forcefully returned to their country of origin by hosting states and non-refoulement. Protections extend so far that even if a refugee committed a serious crime after being declared a refugee, their status is not “canceled,”

¹⁹⁰ McAdam, “The Enduring Relevance of the 1951 Refugee Convention.” (p. 2)

¹⁹¹ Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., (p. 140) The refugee timeline came to an end if a refugee voluntarily returned to their country of origin, if they acquired a new, effective nationality, or there was a change of circumstance in the country of origin.) Those who committed crimes such as a war crime, or acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, (terrorists), do not benefit.

¹⁹² Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. (p. 141)

notable ratification within the 1951 Refugee Convention. Ultimately, non-refoulement as a refugee right is the cornerstone of the refugee system and the law. Because refugees are not to be returned by force to their countries of origin, those who harbor large refugee populations are obligated to provide shelter and security to refugees according to their national citizens' treatment as a minimum standard.

1967 Protocol and Protection

The 1967 Protocol addressed gaps between the UNHCR and the 1951 Convention by remedying temporal and geographical limitations. The 1967 Protocol was to extend the scope of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees so that protections are applied universally. Additionally, countries that ratify the Protocol agree to abide by the Refugee Convention despite not being a party to it. Adopting the 1967 Protocol alongside the 1951 Convention was essential to ensuring protections for displaced people beyond Europe's borders. Before the adoption of the Protocol, people displaced in Asia, Africa, and beyond could not appeal to the international community for aid and assistance. Their neighboring countries did not bear any responsibility, and wealthier western nations were not accountable for providing support or service.

Additionally, nations that agreed to ratify the Protocol indirectly agree and recognize refugee protections in expanding refugee protection. Therefore, the ratifying countries are accountable to the 1951 Convention and its protections even if they are not formally a part of it. These two features of the Protocol were significant to the plight of millions of displaced people.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ "The 1967 Protocol | Kaldor Centre."

These principles were similar to the UDHR. The 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol defined the inherent value of human life globally and the global communities' responsibility to protect the dignity and integrity of all human beings. International refugee protection challenged state sovereignty by assigning a global communal duty to protect and serve vulnerable people. Nonetheless, these principles came to define the role of the 1951 convention and subsequent policies as codified international laws that protect and obligate the international community to assume responsibility for the displacement of people.

UNHCR History and Evolution

While the 1951 Convention was important in codifying international policies and protecting refugees, it also set out a clear mandate that defined the role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This Office provides refugees international legal and political protection under its mandate and seeks permanent solutions.¹⁹⁴ Thus the work of the UNHCR office as it managed the safety of refugees was more influential and substantive, as its existence addressed a gap within international politics. The Office of the UNHCR is a different format than other agencies within the U.N. The UNHCR did not have any direct operational responsibilities. Instead, it relied heavily upon intergovernmental, national, and voluntary partners proving the agency incapable of enforcing strict guidelines or policies.¹⁹⁵ Thus, instead of driving and initiating actions that protect refugees, the UNHCR works with governments; they supervise governments' activities in handling large flows of refugees.

At the onset of the construction of the Office, the UNHCR struggled with maintaining its status and place within the United Nations because of geographical and temporal restraints, as its

¹⁹⁴ Holborn, "International Organizations for Migration of European Nationals and Refugees." (p. 337)

¹⁹⁵ Holborn. (p. 337)

focus was to assist Europeans temporarily for three years.¹⁹⁶ Due to three extensions to the Office and budgeting restraints, the General Assembly adopted a resolution and formally recognized the Office as a permanent entity. The Office struggled to find its place in the international system. Nonetheless, in the 1960s, the Office expanded its role and looked beyond Europe and European refugees.¹⁹⁷ Their expansion drove the ongoing crises of nations in the Global South, including the mass exodus of refugees from Sudan, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Uganda, and Indochina.

The 1980s shifted the UNHCR from passive involvement in refugee protection via legal protection to actively providing security and shelter in the form of camps and material goods. These actions were controversial and indicative of the direction the organization aimed to move towards, protracted encampment. While this was not a policy goal, the attempt to provide aid and assistance in the form of camp construction led to the prolonged encampment as other nations refused entry to refugees without proper vetting. As an agency capable of providing more than legal assistance and a supervisory role, the Office was able to wield political power and strategize to manage hundreds of thousands of people.¹⁹⁸ The 1980s shifted the Office towards a more active and autonomous role in advocating for the rights and safety of refugees. U.N. agencies are often restricted by their positions because their interactions with sovereign states are motivated by national interests. However, the legitimacy of the UNHCR as a moral authority redirected nations' concerns and persuaded them to comply with the Office. Often, the Office of the High Commissioner would strategize and present refugee protection as a symbol of status in

¹⁹⁶ Holborn. (p. 337)

¹⁹⁷ Loescher, "UNHCR and Forced Migration." (p. 591)

¹⁹⁸ Loescher. (p. 593)

the global arena as states participated in setting a normative agenda.¹⁹⁹ This shift gave the UNHCR a role as an agency capable of providing services while challenging state authority, ultimately solidifying its place in the international system as the central authority on refugee and human rights.

More recently, the gains that the UNHCR made in its initial campaign to extend its purview in refugee matters and establish fundamental norms in protecting refugee rights have weakened. Specifically, the Office's role has diminished due to its stricter refugee and asylum policies. The Office has shifted focus from an international-based assessment of refugees to more internal functions by focusing on operations, fostering local civil society, encouraging democratic governance, and working towards conflict prevention.²⁰⁰ Thus, in redirecting their efforts to be more internal, their activities have focused on providing care for refugees on location, in camps, and at the borders of refugee-hosting countries. Consequently, the organizations' transitory duties from resettlement and repatriation to camp management have severely diminished their status globally. Liberal Democracies have defaulted on their responsibilities to the UNHCR mandates of human rights and refugee protection and no longer accept the same number of refugees as during the Cold War period; instead, they may contribute to the UNHCR budget while curbing duties of resettlement.²⁰¹ Ultimately, this paper shows that in shifting its core mission, coupled with the lack of support from liberal democracies, the UNHCR has faced detrimental costs to its purpose that has impacted refugee prospects.

Lastly, the UNHCR and its relationship with Western nations are complex politically but legislatively clearly defined by the Convention and Protocol. However, the Office's role as a

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.* (p. 594)- The UNHCR has acted as a 'teacher' of refugee norms, by using persuasion and socialization to pressure and hold states accountable to their previously stated policies.

²⁰⁰ Barnett, "Global Governance and the Evolution of the International Refugee Regime." (p. 251)

²⁰¹ McAdam, "The Enduring Relevance of the 1951 Refugee Convention." (p. 4)

refugee management judge is within the scope of western interests. While the UNHCR has its own goals and mission, its ability to transition and expand depends on its ties to powerful states, as they cannot enforce global policies set forth by U.N. agencies.²⁰² Politically, states are sovereign and can choose to restrict, accept, or contain refugees and asylees. The UNHCR cannot mandate states to take action, often leading to conflicting policies. Therefore, the expansionary abilities of the UNHCR in the 1980s have been severely limited in the last few decades as states have changed their refugee and asylum policies. Western governments have limited eligibility and even set physical and political barriers for those seeking refuge from war, persecution, or better economic opportunity.²⁰³ Therefore, donor states' influence is globally relevant and tied to the mission of the UNHCR, which came to support the refugee crisis post-1990. These donor states pressured the UNHCR to assist refugees differently, focusing on encampment and repatriation efforts.

The encampment system was necessary as western states refused refugee entry. Thus, many countries whose borders host refugees require the assistance of the UNHCR to provide resources and material goods for all displaced. Camps in Pakistan, Northern Uganda, Albania, and Iran were some of the largest by the turn of the century. As a result, most designated donor funds directed emergency assistance in camps or repatriation. As camp centers became increasingly overcrowded, the UNHCR turned its attention from encampment to repatriation as a long-term solution. About 12 million people returned to their countries of origin during this time. Loescher documents these issues in his book *“The UNHCR and World Politics; A Perilous Path;”* he states, “The Office posited that conditions in the home country did not have to improve

²⁰² Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). (p. 12)

²⁰³ Loescher. (p. 16)

substantially but only enough to allow refugees to return home in safety.”²⁰⁴ This major shift in redefining safety conditions and encouraging the return of refugees to their unstable origin countries broadened the responsibilities of hosting states and the refugee system. It made it easier for states to deem conditions “safe” enough for refugees to return. These shifts standardized the practice of encampment and repatriation.

As camps began to increase and resources dwindled, the focus of the UNHCR became repatriation, an initiative that would return over 11 million refugees in the 1990s.²⁰⁵ Many efforts to repatriate and voluntarily return refugees were possible due to two factors. First, the UNHCR’s attention shifting meant that a more significant portion of their funds was allocated towards reintegration programs, making repatriation more straightforward. With a 12% increase in funds, the \$214 million effort resulted in considerable changes. Next, the end of the Cold War resolved the tensions caused by many displaced people, allowing them to return to their homelands. These conditions were vital to encouraging and easing the process of repatriation.²⁰⁶

The events of the mid-2000s conflicted with the policy direction of the UNHCR, making repatriation an impossibility for certain refugees. Examining specifically Afghanistan, the Soviet Invasion in the 80s and the rise of the Taliban in the late 1990s and early 2000s contributed to the departure of millions of Afghans to neighboring states.²⁰⁷ While the 1980s were a more welcoming time for Afghan refugees, the end of the Cold War and the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States changed the direction of the encampment in neighboring states like Pakistan and Iran.²⁰⁸ The change in refugee reception by neighboring states collided with the shift in

²⁰⁴ Loescher. (p. 17)

²⁰⁵ Loescher. *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (p. 280)

²⁰⁶ Loescher. (p. 280)

²⁰⁷ Khattak, “Living on the Edges.”

²⁰⁸ Khattak. (p. 575) Because international aid was reduced by the 90s, Pakistan changed its stance on refugees and tried to send back Afghans forcibly by initiating a deregistration process in 1992.

UNHCR policy. As the UNHCR focused on repatriation efforts in the 90s and encouraged sending refugees back to their homelands, the precedent adversely altered the policies of refugee-hosting states. As the UNHCR expanded its reintegration programs, funds for camps were severely restricted, making it difficult for refugee-hosting states to maintain and provide resources.

As a resolution to the changes that the UNHCR consistently faces, the United Nations has added several offices and agencies to assist the work of the UNHCR, more notably, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), added as a formal agency in 2016. This agency has nearly \$2 billion in revenue and almost 14,000 employees. Their purpose is to ensure the orderly and humane management of migration. This agency works closely with 172 member states. They are committed to refugee and displaced peoples' issues and are an essential source for the UNHCR to bridge gaps and build capacity.²⁰⁹ More specifically, the IOM addresses some of the most extreme disasters in the world, such as Afghanistan. In 2021, with the evacuation of the U.S., the IOM maintained its efforts while NGOs and other organizations fled. They spent \$108.5 million and targeted 1.9 million people on the move during this time, dedicating \$24 million of the funds to those seeking refuge out of the country. The IOM's response in this fashion is to maintain its responsibility to its ideals and values of making migration work for all. This agency of the U.N. was a key source during a critical time.²¹⁰

NGO History, Responsibility, and Response

²⁰⁹ "International Organization for Migration | IOM, UN Migration."

²¹⁰ "International Organization for Migration | IOM, UN Migration." The IOM continued its efforts all throughout 2021 to focus on Afghanistan and issues a comprehensive action plan to support Afghanistan and its neighbors in 2022.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are inextricable from the UNHCR in many forms.²¹¹ NGOs are national and international organizations, some work in local communities, and others work across the globe, proving their work essential to crisis resolution. Initially, the idea to create a formal institution like the UNHCR was suggested by a group of NGOs focused on assisting refugees. The collaboration of NGOs established a longstanding norm between the UNHCR and NGOs that incorporated NGO assistance in filling resource gaps. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was the first NGO to call for the consolidation of world governments and charities. With additional assistance, the Office of the UNHCR was formally bolstered and supported by sizeable NGOs capable of addressing gaps and providing resources. As a result, 30+ NGOs participated in drafting the 1951 Refugee Convention and establishing the UNHCR. As a result, Article 8 of the Statute recognizes and formally links the UNHCR to NGOs in finding solutions to refugee issues.²¹²

Responsibility

NGOs are not mandated or duty-bound by the international system to provide resources and assistance to refugees. On the other hand, their missions correspond with global governmental desire for less national responsibility and accountability. Often, NGO work allows governments to skirt their responsibilities and rely on NGOs as a quasi-contractor, which addresses issues at a fraction of the price, unlike the UNHCR, whose funding comes from donor governments.²¹³ As a result, to understand NGO action, specific mission-oriented goals, and their

²¹¹ “UNHCR - Refugees Magazine Issue 97 (NGOs and UNHCR) - NGOs: Our Right Arm.”

²¹² “UNHCR - Refugees Magazine Issue 97 (NGOs and UNHCR) - NGOs: Our Right Arm.” NGOs do not have any specific mandate according to the Convention, and thus they operate more flexibly, causing many issues with the UNHCR.

²¹³ Lester, “A Place at the Table.” (p. 127). Governments are happy to support their work, without being mandated via a taxation system, citizens are supportive of NGOs as they can choose to support those, they like without having to contribute to their work.

overall impact, it is crucial to examine their donor and funding structures. Just as politicians are accountable to their constituents and donors, so are NGOs seeking acknowledgment and influence.

While there are over 40,000 NGOs, alongside many other community-based organizations, these organizations channel over 15% of international development aid worldwide.²¹⁴ NGOs' sheer size and proliferation signify their entrenched position in policy and intergovernmental agency structures. For this section, identifying two key NGOs and their funding structures alongside their role in refugee assistance provides an insight into the operational networks of large NGOs whose mission in refugee assistance has played a role in providing a public good. The International Rescue Committee (IRC); and Refugees International are some of the most prominent NGOs assisting Afghan refugees. These organizations' responsibilities are set forth by their missions and adherence to the Code of Conduct, the Humanitarian Charter, and the SPHERE.

Responsibility and duty to refugee protection are vital facets of democratic governments, many of whom are signatories of the Convention and Protocol; however, NGOs do not bear the same duties. Instead, NGOs are duty-bound via the "soft laws" of the Code of Conduct, the Humanitarian Charter, and SPHERE's Minimum Standards in Disaster Response.²¹⁵ These standards serve a significant purpose, to restate and codify humanitarian duties. The Code of Conduct is a ten-point order constructed in 1990 by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Society. The Code of Conduct works alongside the Humanitarian Charter. The Charter addresses humanitarian work surrounding conflicts and war, most notably stating, "The

²¹⁴ Leverty, "NGOs, the UN and APA."

²¹⁵ Slim, "Claiming a Humanitarian Imperative."

Humanitarian imperative comes first—the right to receive humanitarian assistance, and to offer it, is a fundamental humanitarian principle which all citizens of all countries should enjoy.” The ICRC consulted with the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR).²¹⁶

Tangible and concrete standards of humanitarianism are found chiefly in the SPHERE, as it concisely quantifies standards and practices in their duties. Providing “life-sustaining” standards such as water and sanitation, nutrition, food aid, shelter and site planning, and health are all critical components of NGO duties. The precise language in the SPHERE standardizes the duties and responsibilities of humanitarian organizations with particular content. This inclusion of documents such as the Code, Charter, and the SPHERE goes beyond the standards of the Convention and Protocol; these documents are more specific and bind NGOs to more evident and absolute duties. Ultimately, these three pronouncements solidify the claim that humanitarian organizations have duties and responsibilities and a threshold to meet to obtain public and private support.²¹⁷

IRC

With a formidable foundation, the IRC is an organization founded against Nazis ideals, founded in 1993 by Albert Einstein, who felt it his duty to help Jews escape Hitler’s Germany.²¹⁸ The respectable origins of this organization engrain its duties almost entirely to the plight of refugees. With over 13,000 employees, 24 office bases in the United States, nine offices internationally, and an \$825 million a year budget, the IRC stands toe to toe with any other large

²¹⁶ Slim. (p. 115) The first 4 parts of the Code refer to key restatement or re-work of the first 4 principles of the Red Cross. The last 6 refer to relief methodology.

²¹⁷ Slim. (p. 119)

²¹⁸ “Albert Einstein and the Birth of the International Rescue Committee | International Rescue Committee (IRC).”

NGO and is a significant partner for the UNHCR.^{219 220} The IRC makes a considerable portion of its funds from charitable commitments from foundations and governments and is highly dependent on these donations.²²¹ According to Charity Watch and Forbes, the most recent donor profile of the IRC consists of \$461 million from government support, \$325 million from private donations, and \$38 million from other income. The IRC spends 13% of its budget on overhead costs and is 25-49% dependent upon government sources.²²² The United Kingdom and the United States are the two governments most involved in funding the IRC; these powerful western nations support the IRC and the UNHCR in coordination.²²³

The IRC's mission has been to provide global humanitarian, relief, emergency, and long-term assistance to refugees displaced by war. This core mission outlines the organization's focus on its mission, making its work necessary. The IRC works alongside the UNHCR to provide health care, resettlement avenues, education, protection, water and sanitation, and other essential services. The IRC met the standards of the Code of Conduct and SPHERE's critical and consistent criteria, aligning the IRC to the UNHCR.²²⁴

Refugees International

While the IRC provides on-the-ground support, other agencies shift the responsibility of refugee care from emergency services to long-term care. An example of a long-term care NGO is Refugees International. Refugees International operates as a global, independent advocacy

²¹⁹ "David Miliband, President & CEO, International Rescue Committee."

²²⁰ The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation donated \$2 million to the IRC.

<https://www.gatesfoundation.org/ideas/media-center/press-releases/1999/10/international-rescue-committee>

²²¹ "International Rescue Committee." This data is from 2020, based on the IRC's most recent annual report.

²²² "International Rescue Committee | Charity Ratings | Donating Tips | Best Charities | CharityWatch."

²²³ "International Rescue Committee - Wikipedia." In the United States, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, the Bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration, the USAID, and the Department of Health and Human Services. Meanwhile, in the U.K. UKAID, the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, and the Directorate-General EuropeAid were most involved.

²²⁴ The Sphere Project, *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*.

organization that challenges governments, policymakers, and administrations to improve the lives of displaced people worldwide—founded in 1979 as a response to the displacement of citizens in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Beyond promoting long-term solutions, the organizations also provide lifesaving assistance, human rights, and protection for displaced people. Their rejection of funds from governments or intergovernmental agencies like the United Nations is unique to their organization and mission. The organization states, “This means that the humanitarian groups that respond to refugee and other displacement crises often view Refugees International as a key ally.”²²⁵ Because most refugee aid organizations and their allies gear their advocacy to ensure that funds meet an immediate dire need, the work of Refugees International as an organization providing services beyond emergency support their reputation advanced among NGOs and the international community.

With a bold and adamant stance within its funding structure, Refugees International boasts revenue between \$4-\$6 million yearly, with 28 employees, 45 volunteers, and 29 members in its governing body. Most of the organization’s budget comes from corporations, foundations, and individuals like George Soros, with extensive political lobbying initiatives.²²⁶ This organization is a significant NGO because of its advocacy network; as a non-profit in the U.S., its attention toward the refugee crisis is almost entirely systemic. Most refugee efforts focus on material resources and shelter issues; the impact is often immediate and momentary. Recognizing the result of advocacy and lobbying, Refugees International provides another avenue of assistance to refugees that diverges from the traditional NGO landscape.

²²⁵ “Refugees International.”

²²⁶ “Refugees International - InfluenceWatch.” This data is as of 2020

Meanwhile, the actions of Refugees International redirected the attention and advocated for long-term solutions while working on expanding the U.S. immigration and asylum system to accept and resettle refugees.²²⁷ Refugees International works alongside the UNHCR by testifying in their Executive Committee and advocating for more money and resource assistance to the most vulnerable communities in the world. This relationship has been meaningful as the two organizations convene to support and co-create reports about refugees' involuntary movement and displacement.

NGO efforts are enshrined in the Code of Conduct and SPHERE to ensure accountability and transparency and to enhance collective efforts in providing aid to those affected by displacement and disaster. Unlike the UNHCR, the Code of Conduct enshrines the responsibilities of NGOs along with SPHERE. As a result, while NGOs are not beholden to the international community's standards, they are accountable to their community of fellow NGOs. NGOs and their relationship with the UNHCR are critical to filling resource and advocacy gaps. However, much like the UNHCR, the funding structure of NGOs can shift and impact the type of services they can provide. Government funding often drives IRC's mission, and priority as each new western administration's values and budget shifts determine the organization's response. Meanwhile, issues like a global pandemic can severely impact the work of organizations that are not dependent on government funds but are dependent on corporate and individual funds. As a result, 2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic contributed nearly a \$2 million budget decline for Refugees International.²²⁸

²²⁷ "Refugees International Annual Report 2020."

²²⁸ "Refugees International - InfluenceWatch." Eric Schwartz the leader of Refugees International testified in 2019 and blamed the Trump administration in the decline of funds and in the poor treatment of refugees and displaced peoples.

Both the IRC and Refugees International have been closely monitoring the situation in Afghanistan and have spent the last few decades assisting refugees via evacuation and advocacy. The work of the IRC and Refugees International in the most recent Afghan refugee crisis of 2021 exemplifies the capabilities of large NGOs to provide relief to desperate displaced people quickly and effectively. Since 1988, the IRC has provided Afghans with food, education, clean water, and health support. Currently, the IRC offers donations to Afghans displaced within Afghanistan and assists those in the United States. The IRC gives families cash assistance, supports 100 health facilities, provides learning spaces in rural areas, and helps find people employment. The IRC is working with Mexico, Uganda, the U.S., and Pakistan in resettling Afghan refugees with housing, employment, health care, education, and other services. With over 20+ offices assisting newly arrived Afghans, the IRC is crucial in welcoming over 70,000 Afghans as of 2022. Their website encourages donations to Afghans, provides resources for people desiring to get involved, and posts updates and stories on Afghan refugees.²²⁹

Refugees International aligned its mission to the IRC in response to the Afghan refugee crisis. Refugees International set forth recommendations that parallel the IRC's urgency, and advocacy in their donation asks via their website. Both NGOs have made a series of proposals to expand the criteria to assist Afghans in the 2021 refugee crisis. Both NGOs call on the expansion of the U.S. government's P2 program, additional financial support for countries like Pakistan that host large numbers of Afghan refugees, and a more significant commitment to protect Afghan women and girls. Tangibly, the NGOs recommend evacuating high-profile Afghan women and resettling Afghan women at risk.

²²⁹ "Update on Afghan Resettlement April 2022 | International Rescue Committee (IRC)."

Furthermore, they recommend donor countries pressure the Taliban to allow girls to return to school. In advocating for these policies, they also urge donor countries to fund the United Nations 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) with \$4.43 billion, with the United States contributing more than 7% of the request. Ultimately, both the IRC and Refugees International responded despite the funding and political limits of the organizations. The IRC and Refugee International advocacy for the future of Afghans in their media posts boosted and drew attention to the Afghan refugee crisis of 2021 since both organizations have a high-profile status.

Responding Neighbors: Pakistan

Another responsible agent in refugee matters is frontline states, which are nations that border countries are undergoing turmoil and political unrest. While there is much to debate and contest about the responsibility of these neighboring states, especially if they, too, are economically unstable, the fact remains that displaced people often travel to the territories closest to them. As a result, Pakistan has been hosting Afghan refugees since the late 1970s, beginning from the Saur Revolution, when a secular regime took leadership and welcomed the invasion of the Soviets; Afghans were catapulted into a crisis as revolts and resistance took center stage. Soon, resistance movements were backed by the U.S., China, and Middle Eastern countries, pushing people to seek refuge.²³⁰ Initially, Pakistan's government was the first to open its border to Afghans; with the support of global institutions, Pakistan formed a coalition of support to help shelter, feed, educate, and provide medical care to refugees. Pakistan agreed to host Afghans during the Soviet Union invasion until they (the Soviet Union) left Afghanistan.²³¹

²³⁰ Schmeidl, "(Human) Security Dilemmas." (p. 10)

²³¹ Hussain, "PAKISTAN'S INTERNATIONAL LAW PRACTICE ON AFGHAN REFUGEES." (p. 86) This author examines the decisions that Pakistan has made in hosting Afghans, specifically praising the actions that Pakistan has taken despite not being obligated. The author mentions several actions that the Pakistani government has taken that comply with the standards of the Convention and Protocol.

Notably, Pakistan opened its borders to Afghanistan, its neighbor, despite not participating in either the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees or the 1967 Protocol. Regardless, Pakistan has taken on this duty as an Islamic society and as one of the frontline states.²³² According to *Hijrah*, law, or theory, is an “Islamic law that states asylum is right,” duty and a general and comprehensive form of protection.”²³³ This law gives the right of asylum to the individual seeking asylum. As a result, *Hijrah* is a right given to refugees that others cannot take away. Furthermore, *Aman* is the right of those seeking refuge to be granted the right to be protected by an Islamic state, regardless if they are Muslim or not.²³⁴

This portrayal of Pakistan’s interest in assisting Afghans is one version of their actions; another examines the aftermath of Afghan resettlement in Pakistan. Notably, the examination evaluates the forceful registration process that Afghan men and their families had to undergo by identifying with one of seven right-wing religious, political parties that were in defense of jihad while also training to fight with these religious groups. These men returned to Afghanistan to fight against the Soviet Union in a dual attempt at conscription and forced repatriation. Meanwhile, Afghan women and children remained in refugee camps.²³⁵

Despite Pakistan’s cultural and religious similarities to Afghanistan, a foreign territory is neither advantageous nor desired by those seeking refuge and peace. Yet, many Afghans spent the entirety of their lives in Pakistan. Pakistan’s response during the Soviet era was to take Afghans in and host them so long as the country was undergoing an invasion. The evacuation of the Soviets prompted Pakistan to force Afghans to return systemically by stripping camp

²³² Akhtar, “Pakistan.” (p. 118)

²³³ Elmadmad, “Asylum in Islam and in Modern Refugee Law.” (p. 53)

²³⁴ Elmadmad. (p. 53)

²³⁵ Khattak, “Living on the Edges.” (p. 579) Kattak mentions that this creates an imbalance in the camps where it becomes majority women and children as men died in battle. The women were forced to remarry and or be restricted to the camp entirely as strict Islamic law forbid them from interacting outside of the camp.

dwellers of their identification cards. At the same time, Pakistani refugee camps began to experience donor fatigue as funds directed toward Pakistan decreased significantly. By 1995, most centers ceased receiving funds, placing the refugee cost entirely on Pakistan.²³⁶

Next, Pakistan's borders served as a base for refugee warriors. Pakistani soil supported and trained Afghan refugees in two pillars of resistance tactics; guerilla warfare and an ideology to die for, to fight for, Islamic extremism. Supporters of these two tactics were donor states with funds and weapons sent to refugees to utilize in their mission to push out Soviet Union forces. The subsequent Talibanization of Pakistan emanated from these camps, as young boys learned fundamental Islamic principles in the fight for country and God.²³⁷ Ultimately, the government and its policies shifted as Afghans became increasingly problematic for the state and as public support turned. After the Soviet era, the Taliban takeover was welcome. Still, as the century ended, the bombing of a U.S. embassy in Africa by the terrorist leader Osama bin Laden turned the tide. Suddenly, the Taliban harboring and hosting Osama bin Laden, the most despised terrorist leader in the world, stopped western support for the Taliban and their cause.

The next era of Taliban/Afghan relations with Pakistan is one of both support and acceptance, as the Taliban gained its soldiers and followers from the camps in Pakistan throughout the early 2000s. The Pakistani government continues to accept the Taliban as their interests coincide with the Taliban, making their leadership an attractive option for Pakistan.²³⁸ In response, the invasion of the U.S. and the ousting of the Taliban initially contributed to a surge in refugees, a surge that rivaled the Soviet era.²³⁹ The response of Pakistan fluctuated

²³⁶ Schmeidl, "(Human) Security Dilemmas." (p. 15)

²³⁷ Schmeidl. (p. 17). Pakistani officers and the Deobandi religious leaders provided logistical and military assistance in the madrasas or religious schools that were created in the camps.

²³⁸ Schmeidl. (p. 23)

²³⁹ unhr, "Country - Pakistan (Islamic Republic Of)."

throughout the decades as the rise in refugees, and the decline of international support contributed to forced repatriation efforts. Meanwhile, as funds increase via the UNHCR and other NGOs, Pakistan forgoes its efforts to strip people of their identification cards and repatriate Afghans. Despite decades of refugee issues, Pakistan consistently responded to refugee flows from Afghanistan as a temporary situation. Pakistani policies deny Afghans any formal citizenship; they cannot receive traditional access to education or property ownership.²⁴⁰ In addition to more significant pushback and harsh treatment from Pakistan, these policies have forcefully repatriated thousands each year. Below is data presented by the UNHCR describing the refugee levels in Pakistan from 2001 to 2021.

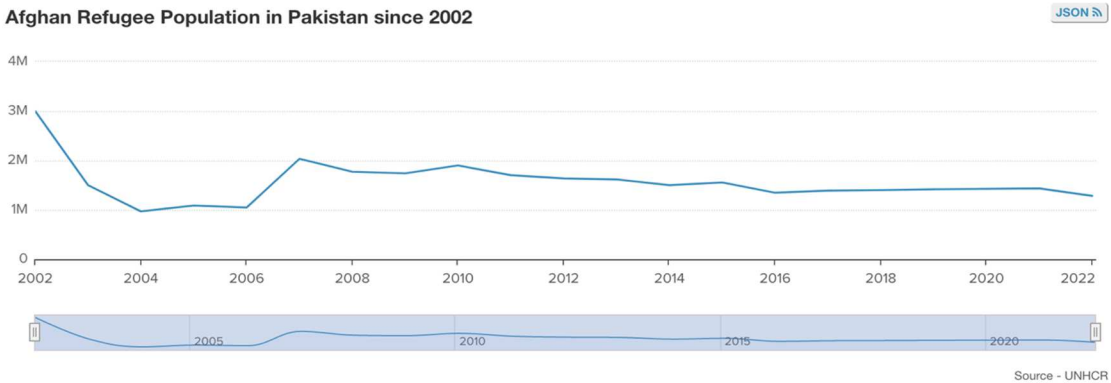
Figure 1 represents the number of refugees that entered Pakistan in the last two decades. The numbers fluctuated initially in 2002 but remained relatively the same during 2007-2016 and dropped a bit further between 2016-2022. The only time there was a severe decline was during 2001-2003, when many Afghans voluntarily returned or, according to reports, were encouraged to repatriate.²⁴¹ These efforts contributed to the closure of camps. However, most refugees statistically have always lived outside of camps, leading to rising tensions between Afghans and the Pakistani population.²⁴² Meanwhile, Figure 2 represents the number of Afghans returning to Afghanistan from Pakistan. These numbers are significant as they exhibit the improvement of conditions in Afghanistan and the worsening of socio-political standards in Pakistan, both encouraging repatriations.

²⁴⁰ Threlkeld, Easterly, and United States Institute of Peace, *Afghanistan-Pakistan Ties and Future Stability in Afghanistan*.

²⁴¹ Noor, "Afghan Refugees After 9/11," 2022. (p. 67)

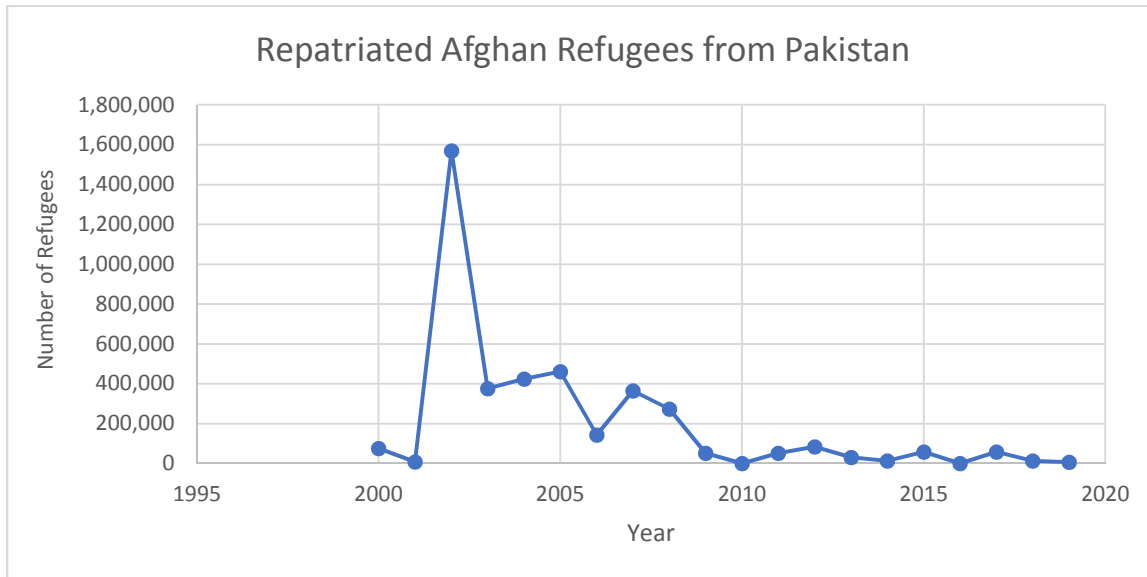
²⁴² Noor. (p. 71)

Figure 21²⁴³



Note: Registered Afghans are those who have a valid Proof of Registration (PoR) cards issued by Government of Pakistan Registration Authority (NADRA).

Figure 22²⁴⁴



Lastly, the critical response that Pakistan and the Islamabad government had to Afghans depended upon the support services provided by the global system. Explicitly, the assistance provided to Pakistan from the United States was both financial and military. Between 2002-2009 70% of the support was security-related, and between 2010-2014, with the allocation of the KLB

²⁴³ unhcr, "Country - Pakistan (Islamic Republic Of)."

²⁴⁴ "UNHCR - Refugee Statistics."

Bill via congress, 41% was economic-related assistance. The shift in focusing more on financial services describes the changing relationship between the United States and Pakistan, as the focus becomes the overall well-being of the Pakistani economy. Therefore Figure 3 illustrates the increase in aid over the years. Donors such institutions provided \$256 million in aid, the U.K. provided another \$334 million, and Japan \$573 million.²⁴⁵ Increased funPakistan's2010 led to another surge of Afghan refugees to Pakistan's border. During this time, repatriation to Afghanistan from Pakistan ceased and only resumed in 2015, highlighting Pakistan's response as contingent upon aid.

Ultimately, in the most recent collapse of the Afghan government to the Taliban in August of 2021, there has been another surge in Afghan refugees into Pakistan. The UNHCR recorded 100,000 new Afghans since 2021 to add to Pakistan's 3.5 million Afghan refugee population. News reports show people who fled Afghanistan to Pakistan are not receiving the critical resources; as winter creeps up, many do not have access to food, shelter, or health services. Additionally, Afghans are regularly searched and deported if they are in Pakistan without a visa. The government has been responding and letting Afghans know they are not welcome; Pakistan is sending a message to Afghans by closing borders.²⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the most recent crisis has encouraged Afghans to protest outside the UNHCR office in Islamabad, with the slogan "kill us" as Pakistan and the UNHCR have not expedited immigration cards, and refugees are at a standstill, without essential services.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ "Aid To Pakistant by the Numbers." KLB bill refers to the Kerry-Berman Bill that was passed to Enhance Partnership for Pakistan Act in 2009.

²⁴⁶ Ebrahim, "In Pakistan, Afghan Refugees Face Hardship and a Frosty Reception."

²⁴⁷ "Pakistan: Afghan Refugees Demonstrate in Front of UNHCR in Islamabad | Indiablooms - First Portal on Digital News Management."

Iran

As another Islamic country bordering Afghanistan, many Tajik-speaking or Shia Afghans made their way to Iran, a country more similar to the culture and customs of Tajik, Pakistan's Hazara Afghans. While Pashtuns stayed close to Pakistan's borders and camps, other ethnic groups did not feel welcome. As a result, Iran became both culturally and economically a viable option. However, as Iran struggled to handle the incoming flows of Afghan refugees, the government in Tehran asked for the assistance of the UNHCR in 1979.²⁴⁸ However, the funding directed to Iran was incomparable compared to that of Pakistan, as Iran received less than one-third of the economic assistance of Pakistan. Meanwhile, Iran was hosting Iraqi refugees and undergoing a financial crisis beginning in the 90s.

Iran has a similar response to Pakistan; decades of raids, harsh treatment, and refusal of formal recognition of Afghans have contributed to tensions between the refugee population and Iranian citizens. However, unlike Pakistan, conditions in Iran are more favorable as resources directed to Afghans have been greater than in other regions. Specifically, the UNHCR reports that a majority (96%) of Afghan refugees live in cities, with only 4% living in 20 settlements managed by the UNHCR. Iran is a party to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, and the government of Iran registers and determines the status of Afghans.²⁴⁹ Interestingly, since Afghans have been seeking refuge in Iran since the 70s, the numbers seeking to return voluntarily are significantly lower than those in Pakistan. There are currently 780,000 Afghan refugees in Iran and 586,000 Afghans with visas to Iran. However, there are 2.6 million

²⁴⁸ Noor, "Afghan Refugees After 9/11," 2022. (p. 72)

²⁴⁹ "UNHCR Helps Nearly One Million Refugees in Iran, mostly from Afghanistan and Iraq.," accessed April 25, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/ir/refugees-in-iran/>.

undocumented Afghans in Iran, which has made the work of the Islamic Republic of Iran difficult.²⁵⁰

In 2004, new policy responses emerged from Tehran as deterrence to incoming Afghan refugees and encouragement for repatriation. The policies included school fees and health insurance schemes and added a tax on Afghan refugees, increasing the monetary burden of staying in Iran. Additionally, the UNHCR sent groups to campaign in Iran, much as they did in Pakistan, to encourage Afghans to return and be a part of the new American-supported government.²⁵¹ As voluntary repatriation was more time-consuming than Iran hoped, they began to forcefully remove Afghans by deporting them. By 2005, Iran had returned 2Iran’s Afghan refugees to Afghanistan. On the other hand, Iran’s repatriation numbers overall have been low and present two perspectives.

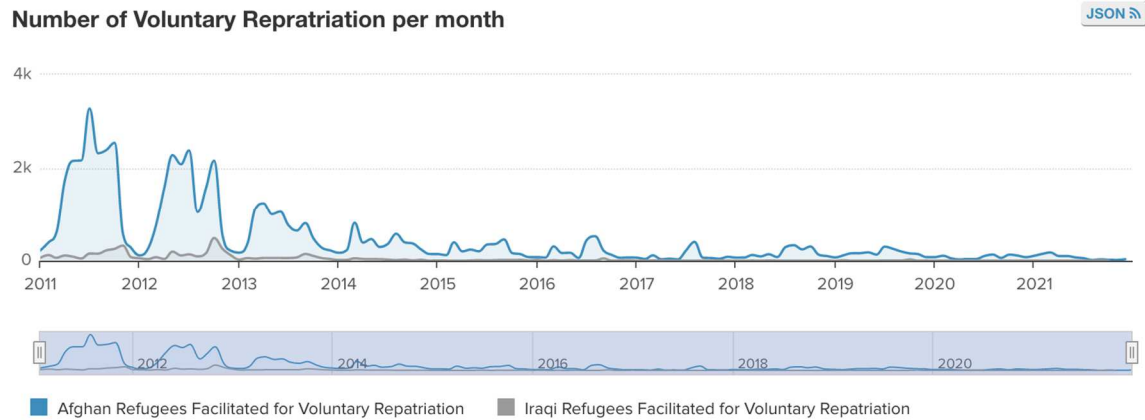
The first is that Afghans are acclimating to Iranian society much better and are finding it less desirable to return and that despite their best efforts, Iran’s government is not as comprehensive in its efforts to return Afghans. However, due to the recent fall of Afghanistan’s government under Ashraf Ghani, more refugees have been heading toward Iran. Iran has responded by sending back tens of thousands of Afghans, with the highest number of forced returnees at 28,000 in October 2021. Iran returned over 1 million people in the year 2021, the highest figure in years, according to news reports.²⁵² Figure 3 presents the dwindling repatriation numbers of Afghans between 2011-2021.

²⁵⁰ “UNHCR Helps Nearly One Million Refugees in Iran, mostly from Afghanistan and Iraq.” This data is from October 2020. The most recent information available from the UNHCR.

²⁵¹ Noor, “Afghan Refugees After 9/11,” 2022. (p. 74)

²⁵² “Iran Deporting Thousands of Afghan Refugees | News | Al Jazeera.”

Figure 23²⁵³



Refugee presence is a tremendous financial and political burden for many Middle Eastern and South Asian countries. Because the Global Souths host most of the world’s refugee populations, they assume the most responsibility, notably, Afghan refugees are hosted by Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, and Ghana, in addition to Iran and Pakistan. The Afghan refugee populations have exacerbated their fragile societies, as the financial pressure to maintain refugees has led to employment issues.²⁵⁴ Furthermore, the frontline states with the most refugee populations, Pakistan and Iran, are more culturally and linguistically similar than these bordering nations. Additionally, countries like Tajikistan early on took preemptive measures to set the precedent that Afghans were not welcome by closing borders during the Soviet Union invasion and again in September of 2000 after the rise of the Taliban.²⁵⁵

U.S. Response and Responsibility

Political instability, financial insecurity, warfare, and state fragility are critical issues that Afghanistan has been facing from the start of the Soviet invasion to the current fall of the Afghan

²⁵³ “Country - Iran (Islamic Republic Of).”

²⁵⁴ Esen and Ayla Oğuş Binatlı, “The Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Turkish Economy.” (p. 2)

²⁵⁵ Noor, “Afghan Refugees After 9/11,” 2022. (p. 74-76)

government can almost entirely fall on the shoulders of the United States. The United States has orchestrated the flow of aid, resources, government support, and military training while directing the Afghan socio-political arena for the last half-century. Additionally, as a global superpower and hegemon, it is evident that the United States shapes foreign policy, precisely international, and is a significant influencer of Western nations' actions in burden-sharing. As a result, this section will examine the role of the United States in working and collaborating with the UNHCR and NGOs and the responsibility the U.S. government shares in refugee matters. Chapter 4 outlines the Refugee entrance issues and statistics concerning Afghan refugee intake by the United States.

The United States is one of the permanent members of the Security Council in the United Nations. While all countries are mandated to pay dues to the global governing body, the United States funds a more significant portion than other nations. The United States supports just under one-fifth of the U.N. budget, or about \$11 billion in 2020. Additionally, the United States spends an additional \$50 billion on foreign aid, and \$2 billion is directed to the UNHCR while also hosting the United Nations permanently in New York.²⁵⁶ Similarly, the United States is a significant contributor to NATO, the hegemonic American protectorate system that ensures the military strength of all those within its fold. The U.S. spends upwards of \$150 billion annually to sustain NATO, proving its strength and influence by making contributions that rival the entire defense budget of European nations like Germany and France.²⁵⁷

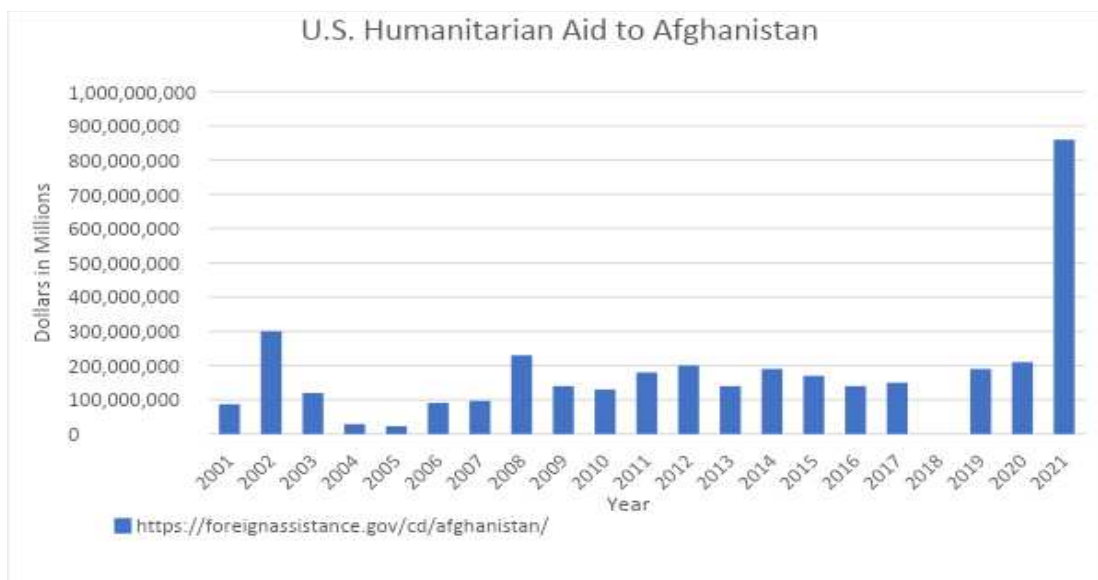
These significant contributions coincide with the United States increased political involvement and military campaigns in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. Providing

²⁵⁶ "Funding the United Nations: How Much Does the U.S. Pay? | Council on Foreign Relations."

²⁵⁷ Calleo, "THE AMERICAN ROLE IN NATO." (p. 19)

billions in aid absolves the U.S. from a more direct approach to relieving the refugee crises it has aided in creating. As the United States prolonged its stay in Afghanistan and increased its military aggression in 2008, 2010-2014, and 2020-21, these years coincided with an increase in monetary assistance to International Organizations and direct humanitarian aid provided to Afghanistan. Additionally, the United States not only funds large portions of global institutional budgets but offers direct support in humanitarian assistance to the countries it is most involved with, like Afghanistan. Figure 3 shows the humanitarian aid provided to Afghanistan throughout the last two decades by the United States.

Figure 24²⁵⁸



Another response that the United States has had toward Afghanistan has been to encourage and provide assistance to frontline states, namely, to fund Pakistan and Iran. Figure 4 shows the amount of humanitarian aid the U.S. directed to Pakistan. At its height, Pakistan received \$650 million in humanitarian assistance in 2010; during that same time, Pakistan had essentially ceased repatriation, while Afghan refugees had another significant moment of

²⁵⁸ "FA.Gov."

displacement, spiking refugee numbers in Pakistan.²⁵⁹ Meanwhile, Figure 5 shows the humanitarian aid provided to Iran; however, with increasing western tensions, it is evident that financial assistance to Iran was largest between 2002-2005. Limited international funding explains the efforts of Iran in the latter part of the decade in forcefully repatriating Afghans. While Iran does not have the same large Afghan refugee population as Pakistan, the involvement of the United States in allocating funds to both countries display a pattern of behavior for the United States. To note, the United States has imposed sanctions and has had a strained relationship over the years with Iran, which has impacted the aid provided to the nation.

As a global leader and economic powerhouse, the United States uses its financial position to influence and “respond” to crises without taking on the actual burden of large refugee flows into its borders. The U.S. is a significant donor to the United Nations and NATO, proving its influence. In its decision to be a donor state, the U.S. has absolved itself from taking on the responsibility of taking in refugees, despite contributing to displacement. The large sums of humanitarian aid are the U.S. government’s primary response in resolving displacement issues. As E.U. countries follow in the footsteps of the U.S., they, too, donate large sums to the UNHCR and maintain their distance. As a result, frontline states often take the brunt of the refugee burden and host vulnerable populations without integrating or being able to resettle them elsewhere. Thus, the response is to maintain the current protracted encampment of refugees, as is evident in the millions still residing in Pakistan and Iran for the last two decades.

²⁵⁹ “UNHCR - Refugee Statistics.”

Figure 25²⁶⁰

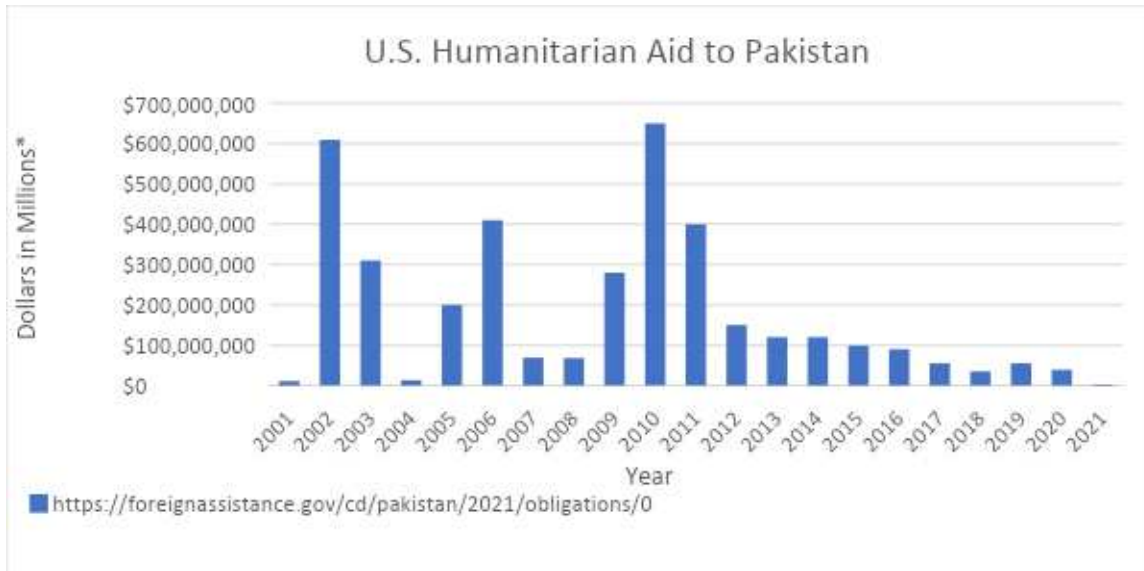
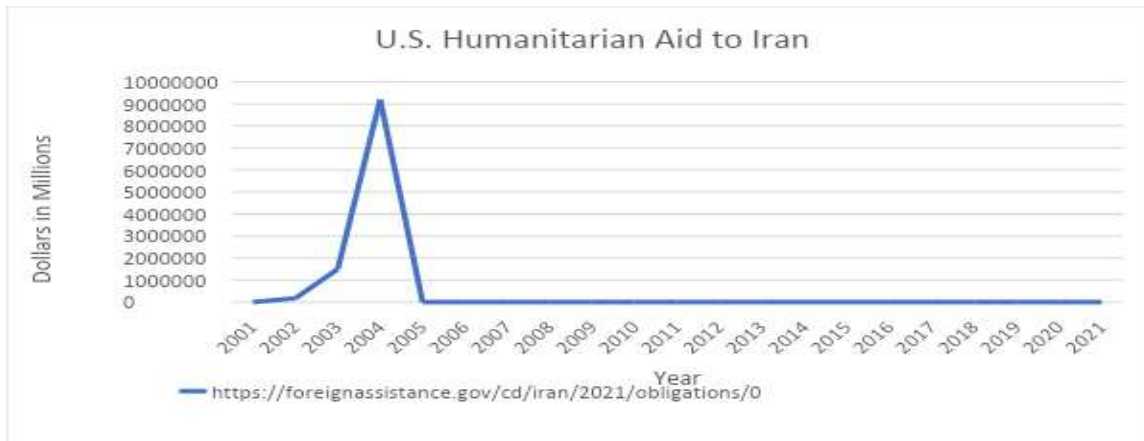


Figure 26²⁶¹



Conclusion

While the responsibility toward refugees is a commitment codified in the 1951 Convention and restated in the 1967 Protocol, not every nation bears the burden of hosting refugees. As a result, the UNHCR takes on the responsibility of providing aid, advocacy, and

²⁶⁰ "FA.Gov."

²⁶¹ "FA.Gov."

resources to displaced people. Similarly, the NGOs in the global refugee system network follow the Code of Conduct, and SPHERE, a set of “soft laws” that mandate their assistance during times of crisis. These institutions are robust and serve as barriers between western donor nations and frontline states based in the global south. These institutions maintain and sustain camps and provide financial aid without taking on additional responsibilities, such as relocation and resettlement.

Lastly, the responses of frontline states and donor states like the United States, with tremendous influence, reflect these states’ geographical responses and responsibilities. Geographical proximity almost always means that states are, by circumstance, obligated to handle and serve any crisis that comes to their borders. With this mindset, both Pakistan and Iran initially addressed the Afghan refugee crisis during the Soviet era. However, the protracted refugeehood of Afghans strained the socio-economic conditions of the nations’ harboring large refugee populations. As a result, the aid distribution of donor states like the United States is critical in assisting frontline states and others like Turkey. The history of Afghanistan and the development of the international refugee system have significantly coincided, as the driver behind the refugee system is its funding structure. Monetary assistance from Western nations symbolizes the commitment of these nations to provide aid and relieve the conditions of refugees. The mercy of wealthy Western countries to assist refugee-hosting states through donations to the UNHCR exposes the dynamics of reliance and subordination of hosting nations to donor states. Thus, the international refugee system and its dependence on wealthy countries determine the destinies of refugees. Primarily, the United States, the richest nation in the design, can donate the most funds to NGOs and the UNHCR, positioning them to guide and drive refugee policy. Therefore, refugee shifts and outcomes depend upon U.S. foreign policy and aid,

making the United States an integral driver of Afghan refugee acceptance and assistance in the foreseeable future.

Chapter IV – The Last Crisis and its Aftermath

Introduction

Filippo Grandi, the current commissioner of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, sets the scene for the last cycle of crisis in Afghanistan, describing the situation within the context of Afghan instability over the last half-century. Grandi exposes the gravity of the situation by mentioning some key numbers that set the scene and require the attention of the international system. The UNHCR, according to Grandi, estimates a total of 9 million displaced Afghans in the last few decades due to many factors, from droughts to natural disasters and, of course, conflict. 3.5 million people were affected by the battle alone. The prolonged wars in Afghanistan have contributed to mass internal and external displacement, making them especially susceptible to famine.²⁶² The UNHCR's position is clear; the international community must pay closer attention to Afghanistan and provide more significant aid to resolve the crisis. With this premise, this chapter will examine the different facets of the last Afghan refugee crisis and its aftermath.

Next, my analysis of the Taliban and their rise to power in the previous chapter, this chapter aims to examine the circumstances and options available to Afghan refugees in 2021-2022. Specifically, this chapter will provide an overview of refugees' needs and destinations, along with the U.N. agencies, international responses, and available resources. Next, this chapter will further investigate the international community's response in circumstances of refugee bottleneck due to resource gaps and the reactions of states with the most significant influence on refugee policy, like the United States. Therefore, the United States' response to the Afghan

²⁶² (Missy Ryan "Transcript: Afghan Refugee Crisis with Filippo Grandi" The Washington Post. January 2022), This was an interview on Washington Post Live, where Grandi expressed his concerns and urged for the international community to unfreeze accounts and offer assistance to Afghans.

refugee crisis in 2021 is critical in this chapter because the U.S. has a political and moral responsibility to Afghanistan.

Investigating the flows of refugees to the United States and the responses of each refugee hosting state exposes the federal asylum process in the U.S. This system is complicated and restrictive, limiting the acceptance and integration of Afghan refugees. Thus, the gaps in the U.S. refugee system reveal refugee barriers and systemic issues in the United States and the larger international community. Therefore, the scope of this chapter includes a policy evaluation and recommendation that provides avenues of relief for refugees.

Section 4.1 – 2021 Evacuation

The options available to Afghans in the fall of Kabul to the Taliban regime on August 30, 2021, were extremely narrow. In the more than 40 years of war and the last 20+ years following 9/11, Afghans have experienced chaos, instability, poverty, and extreme famine. For decades, the United States had been the significant and primary player in Afghans' predicament. First during the Cold War and then in the War against Terrorism. The U.S. at various times aided insurgency groups like the Mujahideen, brokered deals with warlords, turned a blind eye to corruption, and backed some questionable leaders in the pursuit of fighting terrorism.²⁶³ The influence of the United States is critical to understand, as their actions and decisions became a significant part of the Afghan government in shaping the intricacies of Afghan society for decades. Thus, not only the quick withdrawal of troops but the absence of American funds and support led to the fall of Kabul²⁶⁴.

²⁶³ Mathias Bak and Roberto Martinez B. Kukutschka, "Corruption in Afghanistan and the role of development assistance" *Transparency International* (2019) <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep20486>. Afghanistan faced corruption at a rate of 83.7% with over 70% of the population expressing distrust in the Afghan government.

²⁶⁴ Bak and Kukutschka p. 13, state, the U.S. was Afghanistan's largest donor with a total of \$122 billion dispensed in aid since 2002, with 63% allocated toward the security sector, making the withdrawal of these resources a major influence in the downfall of Kabul, and the Taliban takeover.

Unlike other periods of instability, the removal of American support structures bankrupted the nation's reserves and contributed to the desperate conditions Afghans faced. For example, months of negotiations, talks, and treaty drafts legitimized the Taliban. Legitimization of the Taliban prompted funding from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Meanwhile, the absence of the Afghan government from the Doha negotiations exacerbated the fragile trust of the Afghan people and government.²⁶⁵ Taliban negotiations and the simultaneous withdrawal of the U.S. and its support created chaos and panic as the Taliban gained control over the entire country in less than one week. Afghans' urgency to escape was evident in the rise of refugees, internally displaced people, and those rushing to the Hamid Karzai airport.

The 2021 evacuation has been assessed by major news outlets as one of the most chaotic and indiscriminate evacuation efforts, with much of the effort geared toward Americans.²⁶⁶ The New York Times reports that the last U.S. military plane left Kabul on August 30, 2021. About 123,000 people were airlifted out of the country in two months, with many U.S. allies left behind.²⁶⁷ Meanwhile, the Associated Press reports that 124,000 people were airlifted, with flights arranged by the State Department and celebrities like Kim Kardashian. However, the reports cite specifically, “The evacuation, mostly on military cargo jets, prioritized American citizens, U.S. permanent residents, special visa holders or those whose work would likely make them eligible, along with their families.”

Additionally, the United States was not the only country assisting in the evacuation. According to news reports, the U.S. did not evacuate more than 100,000 people alone. Allies

²⁶⁵ Refer to Chapter 3 for U.S. Taliban relations and treaties.

²⁶⁶ The Afghan evacuation of 2021 has widely been reported by news organizations alone, therefore the numbers and recollection of events are conflicting, government sources are lacking and have not been processed as of yet.

²⁶⁷ Adam Nossiter and Eric Schmitt, “U.S. War in Afghanistan Ends as Final Evacuation Flights Depart,” *The New York Times*, August 30, 2021.

such as Great Britain evacuated more than 15,000 people, and Canada evacuated 3,700 people, both Canadian and Afghan citizens, with other countries following suit. Figure 1 details the number of refugees evacuated by each government. Moreover, many refugees waited months to be relocated or integrated into the countries that assisted their evacuation. Some, even one year later, are still awaiting their fate in political limbo, unsure of their status in the U.S.²⁶⁸ Essentially, the evacuation efforts of Western nations were for their citizens and military personnel. Due to a lack of planning and foresight, the unintentional consequence was evacuating hundreds of thousands of refugees.

4.2 Refugees Pathways and Spillover

The disorganized evacuation efforts aside, Afghan refugees faced new challenges after their evacuation, primarily 1-issues in travel, 2- locating countries willing to accept and maintain large populations of refugees, and 3-processing procedures. Afghan pathways often involve tangled and confusing journeys, with some going through European countries waiting in intake centers in places such as Germany, France, Greece, and the Netherlands. Other journeys included Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan. Regardless, the intake centers in western and non-western countries were almost always at capacity, leading to long wait times.

Afghans have been displaced and fleeing their origin countries for decades. According to UNHCR's mid-year trends for 2021, Afghan refugees have been living and/or seeking asylum in 97 countries by mid-2021, with about 85% hosted by neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Iran, and Germany.^{269 270} However, unlike previous refugee exoduses, the options for

²⁶⁸ Steinhauer, Jennifer and Sullivan, Eileen "Thousands of Afghans on American Military Bases Await Resettlement," *The New York Times*, 2021.

²⁶⁹ Pakistan is hosting 1.4 million Afghan refugees and the Islamic Republic of Iran is hosting about 780,000, Germany is hosting 152,700. "UNHCR - Mid-Year Trends."

repatriation or reconciliation were all but gone in this new evacuation period. Thus, Afghan refugees were enduring protracted conditions of displacement. According to news reports, about 18,000 Afghan refugees on military bases overseas, mainly in Germany, are awaiting asylum. Some report their journeys as beginning in Afghanistan, then being transported to Doha, Qatar, then to a base in Italy, and finally coming to the United States, only to be placed in yet another military base.²⁷¹

Journalists interviewed and gathered qualitative data outlining Afghan refugee pathways since their evacuation.²⁷² With reports of 30,000 Afghans per week leaving in August, the crisis has led Afghans to replace Syrians in Turkey as the largest group of refugees.²⁷³ Other reports have shown refugee journeys treacherous, beginning from Pakistan and ending in the Balkans, navigating rough terrain, with many countries refusing passage. For instance, Pakistan built a border wall; Turkey also built a 93-mile wall along its border; Greece followed suit and built a border wall. Nonetheless, taking the risk and paying smugglers to endure the harrowing journey still proves better than the Taliban, especially for those with some funds. These refugees reportedly take routes from Bulgaria to North Macedonia or Serbia, then to Bosnia, Croatia, and Slovenia to reach either Italy or Austria.²⁷⁴ Other stories of volunteers, like an Afghan pilot assisting Afghans, start with journeys that begin in Germany and end in military bases in the

²⁷¹ Letzing, "Where Are Fleeing Afghans Able to Find Refuge? | World Economic Forum."

²⁷² The New York Times, The Guardian, and CNN are some of the media sources, these sources date from August-December 2021.

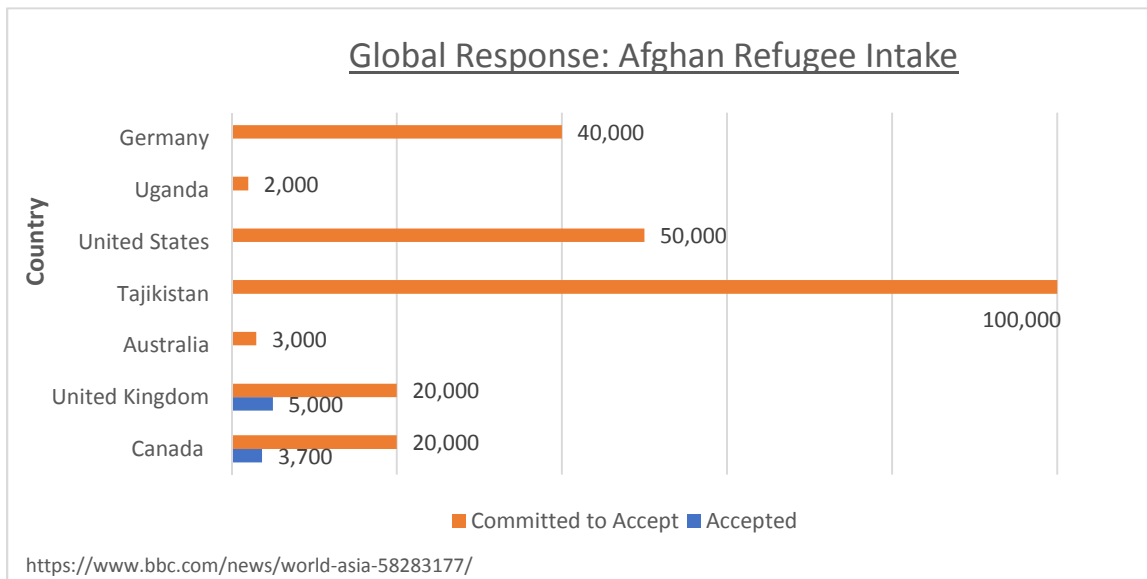
²⁷³ Gall, Carlotta "Afghan Refugees Find a Harsh and Unfriendly Border in Turkey - The New York Times," news, New York Times, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/23/world/europe/afghanistan-refugees-turkey-iran-taliban-airport.html>.

²⁷⁴ Ellis-Petersen, Hannah, Shah M. Baloch, and Lorenzo Tondo, "Pathway to Freedom: Hostile Journey Awaits Afghans Fleeing the Taliban | Afghanistan | The Guardian," news, theguardian, August 26, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/26/hostile-journey-awaits-afghans-fleeing-taliban-treacherous-route-people-smugglers>.

U.S. Afghans are being held in secondary locations until they are processed.²⁷⁵ Military bases like Fort Dix, Texas or Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in N.J., or Fort McCoy in Wisconsin host 44,000 Afghan refugees, while Germany, Macedonia, and Croatia temporarily act as temporary intake centers to vet refugees before they leave for the U.S.²⁷⁶

Global Response and Spillover

Figure 27²⁷⁷



While news reports are conflicting, the United States Department of State has released a fact sheet that identifies critical states in the transition of Afghan refugees from Afghanistan. Confirming reports from *The New York Times*, there has been a relocation of more than 124,000

²⁷⁵ Blake, “This Pilot Fled Afghanistan as a Child. Now He’s Bringing Afghan Refugees Hope on Their Journey to America.”

²⁷⁶ Steinhauer and Sullivan, “Thousands of Afghans on American Military Bases Await Resettlement - The New York Times.” Toosi, “Thousands of Afghans Stuck at U.S. Military Bases Face Long Road to Resettlement - POLITICO.”

²⁷⁷ Figure 1 represents the countries and number of refugees they pledged or are committing to accepting. The blue bar on the graph represents the number of refugees that are to be resettled in the coming year, and the orange bar represents the total number of refugees they are pledging to accept in the coming years. Letzing, “Where Are Fleeing Afghans Finding Refuge?” Rahman, “Which Countries Are Taking in Afghan Refugees and Which Aren’t?,” 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58283177/>.

people out of Afghanistan, 6,000 of which were U.S. citizens. The description mentions that not all 118,000 (subtracting the 6,000 citizens) are within U.S. borders despite the U.S. being their final destination. Furthermore, the State Department reports that resolving the Afghan refugee crisis is a global issue that requires a global response, one that spans four continents and has managed 65,000 people on a rolling basis.

Part of the international refugee processing process is the mobilization of allied states to act as transit centers to vet and determine the status of refugees. Gulf states accepted and processed 37,000 people on a rolling basis and 65,000 processed refugees, awaiting the next steps. The following steps may be to relocate to the U.S. or be processed further in Europe. Many states around the Middle East, Europe, and South Asia volunteered and agreed to process, vet, and or accept Afghan refugees as a symbol of their commitment to support the U.S.²⁷⁸ The ongoing global response of states processing Afghan refugees within their borders has included the involvement of countries such as Spain, Germany, Qatar, and Uzbekistan.²⁷⁹ Regardless of the global response to assist the U.S., the size of the Afghan refugee population led to spillovers. Transit countries used the Afghan refugee spillover to show support for the U.S.

Accepting and or relocating refugees was a response by the global community to appeal to President Biden's call for refugee resettling assistance. President Biden urged the international

²⁷⁸ "The United States Conducts Unprecedented Relocation Effort - United States Department of State."

²⁷⁸ Steinhauer and Sullivan, "Thousands of Afghans on American Military Bases Await Resettlement - The New York Times." Partners and allies includes, Bahrain, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, Kuwait, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the UAE, and the United Kingdom. There were other countries that offered to relocate at-risk Afghans, these countries include Albania, Bahrain, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, India, Kuwait, Mexico, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Rwanda, Singapore, Slovakia, Uganda, and the UAE.

²⁷⁹ The Visual Journalism Team, "Afghanistan: How Many Refugees Are There and Where Will They Go? - BBC News."

community to help in a Group 7 meeting (G7), calling it a “mutual obligation,”²⁸⁰ Thus, the E.U., a major global institution and a strong ally of the United States, assisted in the evacuation process by setting up a crisis cell.²⁸¹ The E.U. and its member states evacuated more than 17,500 people, 4,100 EU nationals, and 13,400 Afghan nationals from Kabul alone; they evacuated more than 22,000 people from Afghanistan altogether. Additional responses include other states' pledges to relocate and integrate Afghans into their countries to alleviate the pressure the U.S. faced. Lastly, the E.U. pledged €1 billion for the Afghan people and their neighboring countries as a support package, with €250 million explicitly allocated for “humanitarian plus” that recognizes those in urgent need.²⁸² Furthermore, in addition to a response from major global institutions, 100 countries have committed to relocating refugees internationally, with many already providing concrete pledges, as outlined above in figure 1.

The UNHCR aligned its response to the Afghan refugee crisis of 2021 to address the support services gap left by the United States. The UNHCR, following the departure of the last flights out of Kabul, released a statement committing to staying in Afghanistan and providing emergency supplies. The World Health Organization (WHO) has been critical to this commitment, which air-delivered 12.5 metric tons of medical supplies, assisting 200,000 people. Other global institutions like the E.U. galvanized their efforts. They released a briefing stating they're committed to the Afghan people in the form of a financial package called the “Afghan support package.” Furthermore, the E.U. heightened its involvement by hosting two forums

²⁸⁰ Khaleda Rahman, “Which Countries Are Taking in Afghan Refugees and Which Aren't?,” news, Newsweek, August 26, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/which-countries-taking-afghan-refugees-which-arent-1623182>.²⁸⁰

G7 members include Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States and the EU
²⁸¹ Maria-Margarita, “Evacuation of Afghan Nationals to EU Member States.” Consists of 100 staff from the EU institutions and a support team in Kabul, including 3 military officers from EU military staff.

²⁸² “Press Corner | European Commission.”

focused on evacuating Afghans at risk and increasing resettlement pledges by E.U. member states.

The UNHCR has led the charge in working with other global institutions and encouraged assistance and partnerships with international NGOs. In a recent report, the UNHCR outlined its response to the 2021 evacuation of Afghanistan. First, the UNHCR has maintained its operations in nearly all of Afghanistan's provinces, except for female colleagues that have stopped their work. Next, in the first week of September, the organization assisted 9,000 persons with non-food items and 8,000 people with hygiene kits. They continue delivering life-saving support items via truck routes from Pakistan into Afghanistan. UNHCR is working with the IRC to intervene and reunite separated families due to the evacuation. Lastly, the UNHCR is urging countries to keep their borders open to those fleeing and are supporting the interagency Flash Appeal program to assist refugees with emergency shelter.²⁸³

Global Advocacy

Evacuations, financial assistance, medical help, and pledges by states to accept Afghan refugees have only been the system's first step in the global response. Fundamental to the long-term response are the advocacy efforts of major global institutions like the E.U., IOM, Amnesty International, the UNHCR, and others, which have sustained the attention of world leaders, encouraging a more significant response. For example, in addition to their immediate response in joining the UNHCR for direct funding, Amnesty International urged the United States to extend the evacuation date, document ongoing human rights violations, and call on the U.N. member states to halt forced returns and deportations of Afghans.²⁸⁴ Furthermore, the coverage, research,

²⁸³ "UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and Pacific: Flash External Update: Afghanistan Situation #5." Flash Appeal is created by the Inter Cluster Coordination Team (ICCT), detailing a 4-month strategic response to the current crisis and the upcoming needs detailed in the 2021 humanitarian response plan.

²⁸⁴ Amnesty, "Afghanistan: Deadline for Evacuations Must Be Extended amid Taliban Reprisal Attack Threat."

and calls from the organization to the global superpowers legitimized the ongoing concerns of Afghans while raising awareness. The IOM has been the most significant emergency relief provider, providing emergency shelter and non-food items from August 15-September 30, 2021. Their work has culminated in a Comprehensive Action Plan for Afghanistan and Neighboring Countries.²⁸⁵ The IRC, another key facilitator in refugee issues, has contributed in several ways. First, in the immediate evacuation efforts, the IRC was tasked with relocation duties, exceeding efforts from previous years. Next, the IRC set to meet the goal of resettling 125,000 Afghans overall. Surprisingly, the organization was able to relocate over 70,000 Afghan allies across the country in a few weeks with the help of other large NGOs. The IRC alone was able to resettle 10,000 Afghans around the country and is currently urging the new administration, along with Congress, to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act.²⁸⁶ Their efforts have resulted in a response that has expanded volunteering programs, led to new hires, and medical assistance programs to incoming refugees, all while advocating on behalf of new Afghans.²⁸⁷ Their advocacy efforts extended to the U.S. Refugee Assistance Program (USRAP), the U.S. government, and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) department.

4.3 U.S. System

²⁸⁵ Noor, “Comprehensive Action Plan for Afghanistan.” This plan covers 2021-2024, the plan asks for \$159 million to accomplish 4 strategic objectives; first, to strengthen capacity to respond to humanitarian and protections need to save lives, second, to address migration and displacement, next, to strengthen capacity for socio-economic recovery and lastly to inform preparedness, response, recovery, and development.

https://www.crisisresponse.iom.int/sites/default/files/uploadedfiles/IOM%20Comprehensive%20Action%20Plan%20-%20Afghanistan%20and%20Neighbouring%20Countries%20final_LR.pdf

²⁸⁶ The Afghan Adjustment Act allows Afghan evacuees to apply for permanent status after one year of being paroled in the country. It bypasses the SIV process, and prevents Afghans paroled in the U.S. from losing jobs or being deported while their applications for these statuses are pending.

https://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/factsheet_afghan_adjustment_act_november_2021.pdf

²⁸⁷ International Rescue Committee (IRC), “As US Closes ‘Safe Haven’ Government Facilities Hosting Afghans, IRC Calls Attention to Local Resettlement Needs in the US.”

USRAP and USCIS capabilities have historically clashed with the asylum system. Due to the extensive application, comprehensive background checks, screening, and interviews, the U.S. Refugee program and USCIS offices require a robust staff to maintain and manage the hundreds of thousands of applications they receive each year.²⁸⁸ Despite these conditions, President Trump shrank the size of these offices by cutting funds, setting caps, and downsizing the employee post. The modest size of these offices further diminished during the Presidency of Donald Trump. During each year of the Trump administration, refugee admission caps decreased. For example, in 2018, the refugee cap decreased from 54,000 in 2017 to 45,000. The astonishing decrease was the lowest since the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980. Furthermore, refugee numbers declined to 30,000 in 2019 and an expected to continue to fall to 18,000 in 2020.²⁸⁹

Due to the gravity of the situation of Afghans, escaping a terrorist-controlled regime, one of their avenues for relief is to apply for asylum in the United States. The United States has two main designations for Afghans and Iraqis to apply for, the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) and the U.S. Refugee Assistance Program (USRAP) Priority 2 (P2) Program. However, the caps, and shrinking size of USRAP and USCIS, presented additional challenges to the wait times and integration process of Afghan refugees. Furthermore, the administration supplemented its previous policies with other procedures, such as the “metering” of individuals, meaning that only a select number of asylum seekers are allowed to present themselves to U.S. authorities. Another policy proposal was to charge fees to apply for asylum, with the price set at \$500 per application. Another issue is the duration of the process to obtain asylum and legal status; with many refugees unable to work or apply for social programs, refugees are having a hard time receiving

²⁸⁸ “Fact Sheet: U.S. Refugee Resettlement - National Immigration Forum.” It takes an average of 2 years to screen and vet a refugee in the U.S. system.

²⁸⁹ “Fact Sheet: U.S. Refugee Resettlement - National Immigration Forum.”

Medicaid, cash assistance, or providing for themselves. Afghan refugees in the United States are in limbo since most are humanitarian parolees, with many attempting to obtain asylum.

Humanitarian Parole

USCIS has set forth some critical guidelines for those Afghans seeking humanitarian parole. This temporary status does not confer lawful permanent residence or lawful immigration status in the United States. Therefore, while many Afghan refugees are in the states, a good portion are here on humanitarian parole. However, those still in Afghanistan could not apply for humanitarian parole because USCIS cannot process applications for those in Afghanistan. After all, the U.S. embassy was closed. Those eligible for parole can only receive their parole status if they travel outside Afghanistan for vetting and fingerprints. Parole status and eligibility only apply to Afghan refugees with an immediate family member of a U.S. citizen or a lawful permanent resident. Additionally, parolees must meet other criteria such as employment in the Embassy of Kabul, an SIV applicant, an immediate relative of Afghan nationals previously relocated to the U.S. through OAW, or an individual referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) via a P1 (embassy referral) or P2.²⁹⁰ Lastly, the application process involves applying separate forms for each family member, a fee (which may be waived), and an affidavit of support from a sponsor that has agreed to provide financial support to every single person considered in the parole application.

SIV

One of the special designations the U.S. immigration system has set forth for Afghans and Iraqis is the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program; within this program are two main classifications. The first is the SIV program for those employed by/on behalf of the U.S.

²⁹⁰ USCIS, "Information for Afghan Nationals on Requests to USCIS for Humanitarian Parole."

government.²⁹¹ The parameters for this application are stringent, including having to be employed by the U.S. for at least one year, and must show proof of having an ongoing serious threat as a consequence of such employment, and must apply no later than December 2023. Additionally, applicants must have letters submitted by the Human Resources offices of the individuals or companies they worked for to be submitted on their behalf, have Afghan passports, and be able to travel and or transport themselves.

The other special designation for SIV is for those Iraqi and Afghan Translators/Interpreters who worked with U.S. armed forces or under the Chief of Mission authority. This program is incredibly stringent and only accepts 50 persons per year. Another qualification is to have worked for 12 months with U.S. forces, and the applicant must obtain a favorable written recommendation from a General or Flag Officer in the chain of command of the U.S. Armed Forces unit that the translator supported. Further documentation is also required.²⁹²

P2

USRAP is the office that works in tandem with the Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). USRAP manages the applications for SIV, and the P2 program, with the P2 program exhibiting less stringent qualifications. Unlike SIV, P2 considers those who worked for U.S.-based NGOs, U.S.- based media organizations, any U.S. government-funded program, any

²⁹¹ "Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) for Iraqi and Afghan Translators/Interpreters." SIV update- As of July 30,2021, the Emergency Security Supplement Appropriations Act authorized 8,000 additional SIVs for Afghan principal applicants, for a total of 34,500 visas allocated since December 2014.

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immig-visa-afghans-employed-us-gov.html#step>

²⁹² "Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) for Iraqi and Afghan Translators/Interpreters."

other project supported by a U.S. grant or cooperative agreement, and those Afghans who did not meet the minimum time-in-service (12 months). However, the standard conditions of providing a letter from your employer and documentation apply. Furthermore, individuals cannot directly refer themselves to the USRAP; the U.S. employment agency must apply on behalf of the individual seeking SIV or P2. Additionally, the paperwork must be submitted by a senior organization member, such as a CEO or Executive Director.²⁹³

Additional requirements are imposed on Afghans applying for either SIV or P2. The SIV and P2 programs require extensive documentation from the individual and any family members. Family members must have a passport or a connection to the chief applicant, such as marriage certificates, birth certificates, and employee badges, while completing several forms, all written in English. Additionally, documents in Dari/Pashto must be translated and certified by an agency that verifies translations. They also require applicants to be located in a third country, they encourage this, but this rule has had some leniency due to travel issues; approval for P2 does not guarantee relocation to the U.S.²⁹⁴

Resources and Scope

The United States' involvement in Afghanistan for nearly 20 years placed a greater responsibility upon them to resolve the chaos, instability, and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people in the aftermath of their decision to pull out. Formidably, the immigration system within the U.S. needed restructuring and broadening to address the consequences of a withdrawal. Despite the need for a reevaluation, the U.S. immigration system remained two processes that did not transpire. Therefore, it is no wonder that the U.S. immigration system is

²⁹³ "Information for Afghan Nationals Regarding Priority 2 (P-2) Designation."

²⁹⁴ "Information for Afghan Nationals Regarding Priority 2 (P-2) Designation."

overwhelmed. In addition to migration issues coming from the Southern region of the United States, the immigration system is battling a dwindling budget, insufficient resources, and staff issues amid a global pandemic. These issues make for a cocktail of inefficiency.

One of the critical refugee government programs within the U.S. is the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) program. The scale of the issue is much larger than the budgets of these organizations, which involves additional funding resources like \$100 million for MRA; however, to navigate around mounting refugee crises, restructuring, and a global health pandemic, the 0.2% modest increase towards these sectors are not accounting for these other factors.²⁹⁵ Furthermore, the budget of the PRM decreased significantly by over \$4 billion.

Another essential government service is the USCIS, which handles immigration and asylum cases. The budget and staffing of this organization are critical to the long-term future of new and incoming refugees. USCIS, too faced large-scale layoffs and spending cuts in 2020. These cuts included a discharge of 13,000 employees, 70% of its workforce.²⁹⁶ To rectify the budget cuts from 2020, the agency had some minor increases in its budget. However, much of its revenue comes from the Emergency Stopgap USCIS Stabilization Act (H.R. 8089).

Cuts, downsizing, and political decisions have severely hurt the operations of USCIS. Furthermore, budget cuts during the Covid-19 pandemic severely undermined immigration services and agencies. The pandemic lowered the number of applicants applying for status, decreasing the agency's resources, as they heavily rely upon application fees to administer their services. Furthermore, for the first time, the agency charged those fleeing and seeking protection

²⁹⁵ "Congressional Budget Justification, Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Fiscal Year 2020."

²⁹⁶ "AILA - Featured Issue: USCIS Budget Shortfall and Furloughs."

in the U.S. to apply for asylum.²⁹⁷ More recently, in 2021, the Biden administration increased the budget of the USCIS and added 1,250 additional full-time employees to reduce the backlog of cases stemming from the previous administration's decisions.^{298 299} Thus, the U.S. government has to work with nine non-profits within the United States to identify refugees with adequate U.S. ties and connections to move forward with relocation efforts.³⁰⁰ The government's downsizing has contributed to their reliance on non-profits to facilitate and expedite their work in the largest refugee crisis that the government has had since the Vietnam era.³⁰¹

Bottlenecks

Bottlenecks are the direct consequence of budget cuts, leaving Afghan refugees in transitory centers like Qatar and Macedonia or military compounds within the United States. The World Cup stadium for 2022 in Doha, Qatar, now hosts Afghan refugees and has been a major holding center since the August 15 evacuation, assisting in evacuating 58,000 people.³⁰² With conflicting media reports, journalists are reporting that Afghan nationals are still located in places like Doha, waiting for humanitarian parole approval; about 40,000 applications have been sent out as of January, and only 145 applications have been "conditionally approved."³⁰³ Other reports indicate that the Biden administration will be evacuating Afghans from Qatar beginning

²⁹⁷ Jordan, "Immigration Agency That Issues Visas, Green Cards Struggles to Stay Afloat - The New York Times."

²⁹⁸ "Appropriations Committee Releases Fiscal Year 2022 Homeland Security Funding Bill | House Committee on Appropriations."

²⁹⁹ The Trump administration in addition to cutting the staffing of USCIS, the goal of the administration was to reduce the number of people who were to be citizens, checking for public charge statuses, and charging \$50 for asylum seekers. Jordan, Miriam. "Immigration Agency that Issues Visas, Green Cards Struggles to Stay Afloat." New York Times Company.

³⁰⁰ The 9 resettlement non-profits are: Church World Services (CWS), Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), World Relief Corporation (WR) <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/grant-funding/resettlement-agencies>

³⁰¹ Duong, "Afghan Refugees Face an American Housing Crisis — Shelterforce."

³⁰² "Doha Settles Afghan Refugees at Complex Built for Guests at 2022 FIFA World Cup."

³⁰³ Aguilera, "Fleeing Afghans Are Stuck in U.S. Immigration Bureaucracy | Time."

in March. The United States uses places like Qatar to conduct security screenings, process interviews and health assessments, and arrange travel efforts in one swoop, aiding the process and cutting down on time. However, these improvements and the utilization of secondary countries as processing centers are still tricky, as many are still waiting for asylum acceptance. Long wait periods limit the U.S. system and contribute to prolonged bottlenecks.

As refugees wait in intake centers or on a military basis, their processing times, in addition to the influx of additional applications of Afghans in Afghanistan and elsewhere seeking asylum, are causing significant issues. Even with an increase in USRAP and USCIS employees, the caps set by the Biden administration are still humble compared to the global refugee crisis. Consequently, the lack of immediate action coupled with limited funds has led to an ambiguous situation for refugee waiting to obtain status.³⁰⁴

Some of the more present bottlenecks that were apparent within the borders of the United States were the handful of military bases that hosted thousands of Afghan refugees. Due to the long processing times, from August 2021- February 2022, the grounds handled over 70,000 Afghan nationals.³⁰⁵ Meanwhile, the Department of Homeland Security is said to close the last base on February 19, 2022. Some of the military bases that hosted Afghans was the joint base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, in New Jersey, which previously held over 8,000 Afghan refugees for 47 days. Military bases in Texas, at one point, hosted over 9,700 refugees, and in Wisconsin, 12,700 individuals and families.

³⁰⁴ DeYoung and Hauslohner, "U.S. to Accelerate Processing for Afghans Evacuated to Qatar, but Thousands More Remain in Limbo."

³⁰⁵ "Operation Allies Welcome Announces Departure of All Afghan Nationals from U.S. Military Bases | Homeland Security."

Furthermore, the issues these bases posed, besides a large number of refugees, was the processing involving health assessments, measles outbreaks, and vaccine distributions.³⁰⁶ In the end, the initial bottlenecks have been relieved somewhat; according to reports, a large portion of the 70,000 Afghans was relocated to 18 states, translating to overcrowding at a state level. The states with the most Afghan refugee acceptance are Texas, California, Virginia, New York, Washington, North Carolina, and Arizona.³⁰⁷

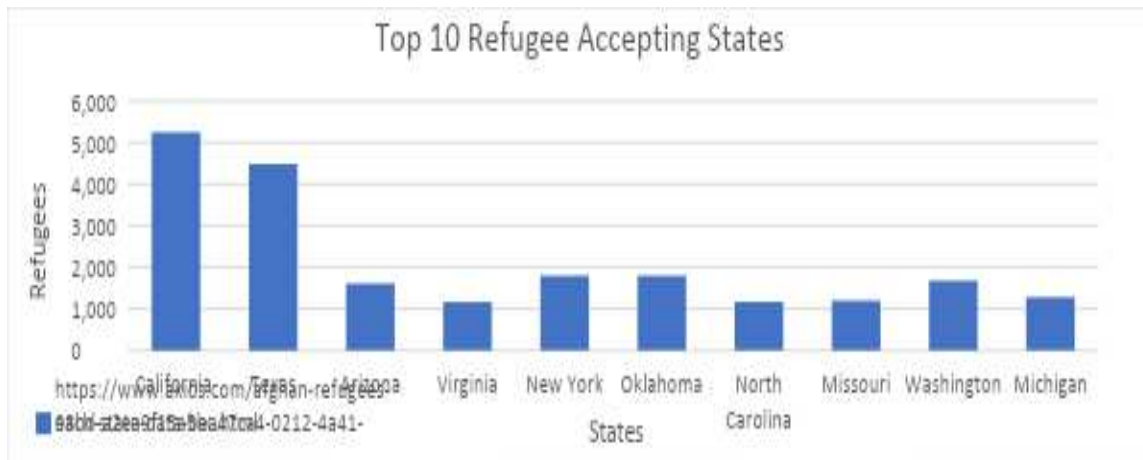
U.S. Reception

The United States and the Biden Administration have released statements saying they are committed to providing adequate resolutions in providing refuge and a “safe haven” to Afghans. The U.S. is committed to relocating and integrating Afghan refugees’ post-evacuation awaiting their fate in holding centers to resolve the crisis. Despite a federal policy push by the Biden Administration to integrate Afghans, individual state responses have staggered. Figure 2 examines the top 10 refugee-receiving states.

³⁰⁶ Due to the time constraints, most people received the one dose -Johnson & Johnson vaccine.
<https://thehill.com/changing-america/resilience/refugees/586605-over-16000-afghan-refugees-were-received-by-just-7>

³⁰⁷ Ali, “More than 16,000 Afghan Refugees Were Received by Just 7 States: Report – The Hill.”

Figure 28³⁰⁸



The most significant issue these states have had in accepting refugees is that the United States is currently undergoing a housing crunch, as many U.S. citizens impacted by Covid-19, inflation, and rising rent prices are struggling. Thus, it has been vital for the U.S. government to have relationships with corporations and non-profits to assist in resettling and providing adequate means for refugees. Rent prices are detrimental in the long term, with California serving as a prominent example, given that it is the largest refugee-accepting state. Thus, finding affordable housing for families with 6-11 members is difficult, if not impossible. Because of the previous administration's refugee policies, the relationships that government and non-profit agencies had with landlords in offering adequate, affordable housing have been lost.

Additionally, because refugees have limited capacities to work and or attend University, the 3-month assistance programs are insufficient and pose challenges for families hoping to afford rent prices past that point. Ultimately, this is an issue from both sides; it is an issue with the system because it is limiting and framed within a Western context that does not account for

³⁰⁸ 46 states have accepted Afghan refugees to be relocated within their borders except for 4 states; Hawaii, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wyoming. <https://www.axios.com/afghan-refugees-each-state-data-bea47ca4-0212-4a41-98bd-a2ea9f15a5bc.html>

large families. Additionally, the system does not consider the hardships refugees face in learning a new language while battling the U.S. refugee system, in addition to rising rent prices and inflation. On the other hand, this is an issue that is a barrier for refugees, as their large family sizes impede their ability to afford rising rent prices, an issue that many within the United States have struggled with in recent years.³⁰⁹

As a result, the State Department has released a report identifying stakeholders willing to assist in the ongoing process of refugee assistance. Some highlights of this report initially exemplify the challenges addressed. For example, because of rising rent prices, Airbnb has committed to making available and covering temporary housing costs for up to 20,000 incoming Afghans. Furthermore, Walmart has announced a \$1 million contribution to refugee and veteran groups; Verizon is waiving fees to calls to Afghanistan; Uber has pledged transportation, food delivery, and cash donations to support non-profits for a total commitment of \$1 million. And lastly, Google has promised to donate \$2 million from Google.org and Google's employee-led giving campaign to IRC, Vital Voices, and UNHCR; \$2 million in ad grants to get humanitarian information to refugees; and a \$250,000 grant to the Committee to Project Journalists to support Afghan journalists.³¹⁰

Many U.S. companies pledged and assisted non-profits and the government in refugees' relocation and integration efforts to be helpful. Still, its efforts have had little long-term impact. Thus, it is up to the non-profits assisting in resettlement and communities hosting refugees to assist in acclimating Afghans and providing resources for their success. There have been polls that relay the public discourse surrounding Afghan refugees within the United States, much of

³⁰⁹ Duong, "Afghan Refugees Face an American Housing Crisis — Shelterforce."

³¹⁰ "Office of Global Partnerships: Partnerships for Afghan Response - United States Department of State."

which has been positive. 7 out of 10 Americans support the resettlement of Afghans within the U.S. Republicans, and white rural voters have even higher numbers of support. Their reasoning was tied to the support services that Afghan provided Americans and their relationships with armed forces, believing Afghans to be strong allies. Many American military agencies viewed Afghan allies as a “priority” due to the 20-year-long invasion of the U.S. Due to the 20 years of occupation, U.S. agencies and military branches formed strong ties with Afghan citizens employed as translators, NGO workers, and military personnel working to fight against Taliban forces.³¹¹ Despite advocacy efforts, Afghan refugees and allies face rigorous immigration procedures and hostile conditions from U.S. states.

Examining the top 3 states, California, Texas, and New York, along with the resources available to Afghan refugees, provides a peek into the services and gaps for Afghan refugees. As the most prominent Afghan refugee hosting state, California has a few immediate assistance programs, including short-term cash and medical assistance, case management, foreign language classes, and job readiness, along with assistance in applying for public benefits like Cal Fresh. Those who are here under humanitarian parole are exempt from these programs. However, those under SIV and P2 are the only designated groups able to access these resources.³¹² Meanwhile, since California is a state that hosts a sizeable Afghan-American population, the community that already exists is offering translation services, donating goods, organizing protests, advocating, and bringing awareness to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.³¹³

³¹¹ Joel Rose, “Afghan Refugee Resettlement in U.S. Has Broad Support, Poll Finds: NPR,” npr.org, September 9, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/09/1035240731/support-for-resettling-afghan-refugees-in-the-u-s-is-broad-but-has-limits>.

³¹² “CHHS Departments Support Afghan Arrivals - California Health and Human Services.”

³¹³ Josie Huang, “With Broken Hearts, SoCal Afghans Plead with US To Take in More Refugees | LAist,” *Laist.Com*, August 17, 2021, <https://laist.com/news/survivors-guilt-california-afghans-pleads-with-u-s-to-take-in-more-refugees>.

Texas is another state that hosts a large number of Afghan refugees. Texas' reception begins in Congress, following immediately after the evacuation efforts; U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar led the discourse and action in welcoming Afghans by taking a tour of refugee facilities and urging for more compassion.³¹⁴ Unlike California, Texas does not have a government website dedicated to resources for newly arrived Afghans. Most of the resources available to Afghans within Texas exist via the major resettlement organizations and the Refugee Services of Texas. However, the refugee services of Texas' have a starkly different presentation in their assessment of Afghans. The website addresses Texans' critical concerns about Afghans, primarily vetting procedures. Additionally, social welfare programs, along with cash assistance, are not part of the package for those in Texas.³¹⁵

New York is the last state to examine, with the most populated city on the East coast. The new governor of New York, Governor Hochul, has committed \$2 million in state funding to assist Afghan evacuees resettling in New York. This funding aids existing social welfare programs and structures such as ODTA and the NYS Office for New Americans. As of March 2022, the state of New York expects to receive 1,800 Afghan evacuees to arrive. Making room for new refugees galvanized the state to implement cultural competency training programs for individuals and families. Furthermore, New York invests in English language instruction, procedures to ease refugee benefits programs, driver's licenses, identification acquisition, and mental health services to meet needs.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Livingston, "Texans in Congress Welcome Afghan Refugees, Disagree on Blame for Tragedy | The Texas Tribune."

³¹⁵ "Blog: Blog: Who We Are: Refugee Services Texas: Afghan Evacuees and the Resettlement Process," refugee services of Texas, *Rstx.Org* (blog), October 12, 2021, <https://www.rstx.org/who-we-are/blog/blog.html/article/2021/10/12/afghan-evacuees-and-the-resettlement-process>.

³¹⁶ "Governor Hochul Announces \$2 Million in State Funding to Help Afghan Evacuees Resettle in New York State | Governor Kathy Hochul."

Overall, the examination of these three states can be generalized as an adequate representation of the U.S. response to the reception of Afghan refugees. The resources were available to those on the West coast versus the South versus the North East were very different. While more resources are available on the west and east coast, these areas face the brunt of the housing crisis and inflation issues. Thus, it is reasonable to expect more resources for refugees to access and mitigate the costs they are eventually due to bear. However, the general issue remains that Afghans are still underfunded, and long-term resources are meager.

5.1 Systems Critique

As a significant donor state, the United States is critical to the international refugee system. As a result, the actions and policies that the United States puts forth have a rippling effect with a significant impact. As the largest donor to the UNHCR, and the largest donor to some of the most critical refugee-assisting NGOs, the United States is the most impactful state in the relocation process of refugees. However, these accolades are only one aspect of the story; the major takeaway is that by positioning itself as the financier of the refugee system, the U.S. has positioned itself as solely a guide. Thus, the United States directs and guides the UNHCR, NGOs, and other nations to host, process, and integrate refugees into particular areas while absolving itself from hosting and accepting refugees. The U.S. has historically accepted low numbers of refugees. Furthermore, the U.S. sets caps on the number of refugees and immigrants accepted per year in addition to strict policies limiting asylum applications.

As a donor state, the United States refugee and immigration system is intentionally designed to limit the number of refugees and immigrants. By design, USRAP and USCIS cannot handle the current global refugee crisis, much less the aftermath of the U.S. withdrawal. The system has been structured to limit the number of refugees and immigrants accepted annually

regardless of the administration in office. With conservative factions shrinking the size of these two offices and progressive sections increasing numbers marginally higher than the previous administration, the cat-and-mouse game only exacerbates the problems of refugees as they struggle through processing in an ever-declining immigration system.

Lastly, the U.S. system limits Afghan refugees to only three possibilities of asylum, humanitarian parole, SIV, and P2. All three of these avenues present their challenges, with humanitarian parole requiring family members to vouch, show substantial personal income, and agree to legally and financially be responsible for the individual. The rigorous process ensures parolees will avoid becoming a “public charge” by assigning family members responsibility over the parolee for ten years. This process is also arduous and involves several levels of background checks, interviews, and wait times that deter many from applying. Additionally, this process is only for those with family members and connections in the United States.

Next, SIV and P2 applicants also have a lengthy application process requiring English proficiency, internet access, and all supervisors' contact information. These requirements for both these processes prove to be almost impossible as obtaining letters and documents from military personnel, contractors, or NGO officials became increasingly tricky with lost numbers and inadequate cellular and Wi-Fi service. The withdrawal of the U.S. in August of 2021 effectively shut down significant lines of communication, electricity, and other services, making SIV and P2 applications rare. Furthermore, Taliban members were knocking on doors, dragging people out of their homes, and conducting searches looking for those involved in any capacity with the U.S. these actions prompted many to bury or burn their documents and computers. Therefore, many allies that worked with U.S. military members, contractors, and NGOs are awaiting their fate as

they struggle to obtain letters and other support documents to apply for these two specific designations.

5.2 Policy Recommendations

The first policy recommendation would be for the government to rectify the mistakes of the Trump administration. The Trump administration furloughed almost 70% of USCIS employees. Meanwhile, the Biden Administration only increased an additional 1,200+ jobs in 2021, nowhere near the acceptable number of employees needed to handle a refugee crisis of this magnitude. Thus, the administration must hire other employees and increase the size of its budget by at least \$5 billion, accounting for the amount that was cut and extra funding for the more significant stress in the application system.

The following policy recommendation would be to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act to allow Afghans pathways to citizenship. The Afghan Adjustment Act is for those on humanitarian parole, as they cannot apply for permanent status. This bill was introduced in December 2021 and is critical to addressing the backlog of asylum applications while providing Afghans with the chance to have standing in the United States, allowing them to work and integrate into the U.S.³¹⁷ The Afghan Adjustment Act would be similar to the Immigration Reform and Control Act passed in 1986, legalizing the status of millions of unauthorized immigrants from Latin America so long as they met specific criteria. In the case of Afghans, their position in the U.S. is already ambiguous, and with worsening conditions in Afghanistan, the ambiguity of humanitarian parole presents health concerns and financial hardships for Afghan families.

Lastly, the final policy recommendation would be for the federal government to provide additional aid and financial support. Families cannot work because of their status, and those with

³¹⁷ HIAS, "Factsheet: Afghan Adjustment Act."

large families are contending with rising rent and inflation. Refugees need more significant assistance than the initial three months of rent and food provided. They need long-term effective resolutions that provide avenues beyond social welfare programs.

Conclusion

Despite the crushing situation in Afghanistan, there is real potential for the United States and the global community to help Afghan refugees. Afghans have been refugees for decades but never faced circumstances as dire and harsh as they do today. Therefore, evaluating the last Afghan refugee crisis and its aftermath, many issues capture the barriers Afghans face. Beginning with the initial evacuation process and the countries willing to take Afghan refugees, it was evident that many countries were hesitant, with numbers and pledges much lower than expected. Furthermore, the transit journeys of Afghans involved a series of intake centers, countries, and holding places that only prolonged suffering. The spillovers continued to affect countries like Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey, as they once again dealt with the brunt of the Afghan refugee crisis. The UNHCR and other global institutions pledged funds and resources. Still, given their constraints in interacting with sovereign nations, they could not assist further and provide long-term relief.

Lastly, the disappointments faced by Afghan refugees extend further as they navigate a tedious and challenging immigration system that asks too much of them and assumes their understanding of complex asylum processes. Furthermore, placing Afghan refugees in some of the most expensive cities in America during a massive housing crisis in the middle of a global pandemic has created additional issues. Nonetheless, the Afghan-American community, in conjunction with local non-profits, has volunteered their time, donated goods, provided

translation services, and advocated politically to provide some relief to a devastating humanitarian disaster.

V- Conclusion

Each period of Afghan refugee flows was precipitated by a combination of issues stemming from the involvement of foreign interests. The first significant refugee flow out of Afghanistan established a precedence of migration and exposed an avenue of relief for Afghans undergoing war, famine, and instability. Before the invasion of the Soviet Union, Afghanistan underwent centuries of instability and chaos due to its geography, ethnic conflicts, and ensuing instability within Kabul. These issues evolved into a dependency structure that would drive each Kabul administration to require assistance and aid from the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, the United States, and EU states. The involvement of foreign entities in Afghanistan unfolded from Afghanistan's significance in the Great Game to Britain's invasion and their road to independence. Due to British and Russian interests in gaining influence in the South Asian region, their desire for influence shaped the borders of Afghanistan. The negligent actions of Great Britain and Russia in structuring the borders of Afghanistan led to centuries of internal ethnic and religious disputes, further exploited by foreign countries.

As a result, Afghanistan's instability served as a host to the decades of proxy wars between the Soviet Union and the West. Subsequent wars followed and matured into protracted warfare. This thesis evaluated the history of Afghanistan as a series of events and conflict driven by internal differences due to ethnic, religious, and familial disputes, followed by a heavy dependence on foreign aid. These disputes, conflicts, and desire for power led to coups and power changes in Kabul, destabilizing the country's governance structure. Soon, Afghanistan's instability and dependence on aid invited the invasion of the Soviet Union. The thesis evaluates the invasion of the Soviet Union as the origin point of Afghanistan's refugee flows. The refugee system and its ability to handle large influxes of refugees along with its ability to predict,

respond, and manage large refugee flows is an essential component of this thesis. Ultimately, proving that despite the billions in funding, large NGOs and the UNHCR can only respond to refugee crises based upon the direction of their donor states. Specifically, donor states like the United States, whose ability to contribute more than any other nation along with its decade's long presence in Afghanistan places responsibility upon its shoulders. Therefore, the thesis concludes by examining the landscape of the U.S. system of asylum/migration for those evacuated in August 2021.

Afghanistan's state evolution and political and social development disruptions culminated in warfare and displacement. Chapter I and Chapter II coincided with one another as the background of Afghanistan's history established a timeline and set a foundation and explanation for the instability and insecurity of the nation. Chapter I examined the history of Afghanistan as a region marred by the ethnic, religious, and foreign conflict that has resulted in tensions and provided the roots of dissent.³¹⁸ Historical insight into Afghanistan's clashes and provides the necessary background to understanding the instability of Afghanistan. The chaos in Afghanistan's history formed the Mujahid during the Soviet Union invasion, the fracturing of this guerilla group then resulted in internal conflict leading to the Afghan Civil War (1992-1996), and the exodus of millions raised in refugee camps in Pakistan. Pakistan's refugee camps became the birthplace of the Taliban, and young boys whose families were torn from them during the Soviet invasion were forced to live without family support. Boys whose source of survival depended upon the refugee camps and the madrassas that taught them jihadi ideology.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ Dalrymple, *Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan*. (p. 94)

³¹⁹ Crews and Tarzi, *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*. (p. 59)

These ideologies, coupled with the desire to stabilize a war-torn Afghanistan, manifested into the Taliban takeover (1996-2001). These years then led to the Taliban distancing itself from the international community and building ties with the Saudi government forging closer friendships and communities with Al-Qaeda. These ties contributed to antagonistic exchanges with the United States, resulting in the invasion of the United States after 9/11.³²⁰ The invasion of the United States came with decades of military campaigns like Operation Enduring Freedom, which involved thousands of aerial strikes, casualties, and deteriorating support from the Afghan people. The decades of war ended in hundreds of thousands of casualties and; thousands of deaths and cost billions of dollars. In the end, the involvement of foreign interests coupled with a weak Kabul government culminated in the second Taliban takeover after the United States negotiated with the Taliban for nine months in Doha, Qatar, without the involvement of the Afghan government.³²¹

Chapter II examined the migration flows of Afghans out of Afghanistan during the most unstable, insecure periods of its history, explicitly considering the destruction during and after the Soviet Union invasion.³²² The Soviet Union invasion historically can be examined as the start of the mass displacement of Afghans and the root of Afghanistan's contemporary refugee dilemma. Chapter II also examined the flow of refugees in context to the historical conditions of Afghanistan as evidence of ongoing instability that contributed to displacement. This chapter further explored the Afghan state's financial dependence, the Kabul administration's internal conflicts, and the shifting governing structures that heightened tensions and produced insecurity.

³²⁰ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. (p. 276)

³²¹ "Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan."

³²² Jackson, "The Cost of War: Afghan Experiences of Conflict 1978-2009." (p. 22)

The vulnerabilities of the Afghan state appealed to the Soviet Union's interest in the region. Therefore, the financial and political ties of the Soviet Union forged bonds that shifted Afghanistan's political structure to favor socialist and communist ideals. These values formed the People Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and galvanized rural Pashtun people to respond in kind. This chapter evaluated the essential relationship between the Soviet Union, its influence, and its relationship with Afghanistan. Afghanistan and the Soviet Union's connection was the source of kindling that inspired internal conflicts. the formation of the Taliban garnered the attention of western states and prompted a more significant invasion that displaced millions of Afghans.³²³

The influence of the Soviet Union and its attempt to secularize Afghanistan were the embers of a fire that ignited entire regions and provinces to form militias and fight against the pressures of the PDPA. The PDPA separated itself from the primarily rural, Sunni Islamic traditions of the Pashtun ethnic group, who's size made up most of Afghanistan. The alienation of the Pashtun tribes and leaders from crucial decisions during this time contributed to conflicts that separated Kabul's elite classes from that of the rural, average Afghan. Alienations of Afghanistan's largest ethnic group coupled with the Cold War conditions prompted the rise of the Mujahideen and the involvement of financiers like the United States. These historical moments were critical to the decision-making of many Afghans during the time, as the invasion of the Soviet Union by invitation of the PDPA government, the rise of tensions within rural communities, and the beginning of militia warfare and guerilla tactics made for an inhospitable and dangerous climate for Afghans.³²⁴ Facing these security issues, ongoing bombs, land mines,

³²³ Borer, "Soviet Foreign Policy toward Afghanistan 1919-1988." (p. 30)

³²⁴ Lohr, "Moscow's Millions of Deadly Seeds: Afghan Mines - The New York Times."

and an onslaught of other Soviet military campaigns, millions of Afghans fled to nearby Iran and Pakistan. With most Afghans living in Pakistan.³²⁵ These critical issues were a major part of chapter II.

Additionally, Chapter II examined refugee flows out of Afghanistan into Pakistan and Iran during the Soviet Union as the earliest refugee flow from Afghanistan. Therefore, central to the chapter's focus is the foundation of Afghan displacement as built upon the Soviet Union invasion, which presents a baseline insight into contemporary Afghan refugee issues.

Afghanistan's refugee flows and pathways remained much the same since the time of the Soviet Union invasion. The pattern of flows and points of access remaining the same for decades revealed the awareness of front-line states and global institutions of avenues of assistance to Afghans. These parties are shown to be negligent in their ability to predict, safeguard, and assist Afghan refugees during each cycle of chaos and violence.

Afghan refugee flows continued to use the same pathways in 2021 (Iran and Pakistan) and faced the same struggles as previous generations of refugees. These difficulties were further exacerbated by the structure of refugee camps in front-line states.³²⁶ And lastly, this section of the chapter examined the response of other nations and agencies connected to the West. These parties did not respond accordingly to each cycle of the crisis, as a result, many Afghan refugees were centered and located in the Global South. Therefore, each era of Afghan refugee flows has culminated in front-line states accepting most Afghan refugees. Concurrently, front-line states emphasized repatriation during each wave, leading to the internal mass displacement of repatriated Afghans in large cities like Kabul.

³²⁵ "UNHCR - Refugee Statistics."

³²⁶ Tronc and Nahikian, "Fragile Futures: The Human Cost of Conflict in Afghanistan." (p. 19-20)

Chapter II's final and most compelling argument is the data between the different eras of political crisis, from internal conflicts to foreign invasions, to the rise of rebel/jihadi groups, Afghanistan's issues ladder up to mass displacement. These eras of political and social disturbance coincide with the number of casualties and deaths, producing a constitutive relationship; whereby periods of increased conflict led to high numbers of refugee flows. For example, 2015-2016 was one of the deadliest years for Afghans as the Afghan government could not contain the battle between the Taliban and the United States. Therefore, this period produced large influxes of Afghan refugees to Iran, Pakistan, Greece, and Turkey.³²⁷ Thus, Chapter II related data pertaining to attacks, and refugee flows with the historical issues of each period which confirmed the relationship between insecurity and refugee exodus.

Chapter III evaluated the responses of international institutions and their responsibility to refugee/displaced populations.³²⁸ Internationally established documents codified the duties and responsibilities of international institutions like the UNHCR. UNHCR's duties and baseline responsibilities were outlined within the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and subsequently in the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, which broadened the scope of the UNHCR. The duties of the UNHCR constituted a significant part of the international refugee system built upon the actions and policies of the UNHCR. Therefore, the gaps in response toward Afghan refugees became apparent after evaluating the foundational documents of the UNHCR. As a global institution with billions in aid, and strong ties to donor states, the UNHCR is inefficient as an institution with the primary duty to assist displaced people. Chapter III's concluded with an analysis of the UNHCR as an institution that has not been accountable to

³²⁷ "The U.S. War in Afghanistan | Council on Foreign Relations."

³²⁸ UNHCR, "The Refugee Convention, 1951: The Travaux Preparators analyzed with a Commentary by Dr. Paul Weis."

its mission and the standards of the 1951 Refugee Convention; instead, it has maintained a policy of western appeasement. Specifically, Chapter III examined the UNHCR in context to its relationship with Western nations and the role these nations play in the direction they take to assist refugees. In the case of Afghanistan, the UNHCR initially assisted front-line states with aid but soon rolled back these programs and opted for repatriation. The shift in UNHCR duties from supporting and helping to encouraging repatriation, reflects their relationship with Western nations. Western nations and their refusal and or staggered acceptance rates of Afghan refugees prompted the UNHCR to change its direction of relief and aid. As a result, the role of the UNHCR was contextualized to its relationship with Western/ donor state's interests.³²⁹

Therefore, 2002 saw the most significant Afghan repatriation numbers in UNHCR history, with 1.2 million returning from Pakistan and Iran.³³⁰ However, the repatriation efforts guided by the UNHCR resulted in the internal displacement of Afghans within Afghanistan, an issue that the agency ignored. Thus, without sufficient camps and support within Afghanistan, many internally displaced Afghans became part of the cyclical pattern of displacement and refugees, with many livings abroad and returning several times, as presented in the rise and fall of refugee numbers.

Next, the chapter examined the relationship between the UNHCR and international non-governmental agencies (NGOs) like the IRC and Refugees International. These organizations were not beholden to the same international documents and laws as the UNHCR, but their compliance with the Code of Conduct and SPHERE makes them strong partners for the UNHCR.³³¹ Due to funding or accessibility issues, NGOs with a mission to assist refugees were critical actors in relieving pressure on the UNHCR. However, their response also depended on

³²⁹ "Loescher - 2001 - The UNHCR and World Politics a Perilous Path.Pdf." (p. 12)

³³⁰ Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*. (p. 256)

³³¹ Slim, "Claiming a Humanitarian Imperative."

donor states. By examining the funding structure of NGOs to identify the top donor states, like the United States, a pattern of influence forms. Essentially, by donating millions to the UNHCR and NGOs, the United States can dictate refugee policy from assistance and aid to repatriation programs.

Furthermore, an examination of the role of donor states was a significant part of the international refugee system. The influence of powerful countries like the United States produced two primary responses that harmed the refugee system. First, donor states could absolve themselves from granting asylum and relocating refugees within their borders. They could provide large donations and skirt their role in refugee relocation efforts. Second, donor states and their influence harmed refugee populations, as policy shifts did not consider alleviating refugee problems but instead focused on the political interests of donor states like the U.S.³³²

Front-line states like Pakistan and Iran required an additional evaluation within this chapter as crucial actors in resolving, aiding, and relieving the Afghan refugee crisis. As bordering states, these two countries involved themselves first as Muslim nations and second as neighbors willing to assist.³³³ During each period, these two states took in the most significant amount of Afghan refugees. However, many programs and assistance programs were limited to the Soviet invasion era. As the protracted encampment of Afghan refugees became a permanent fixture of Pakistani and Irani society, the welcome mats of the soviet era began to roll back. Understandably, the aid to Iran fluctuated and soon evaporated as conditions and ties between Iran and the West became increasingly hostile. Iran's tensions with the west and internal

³³² "Funding Partners | Afghanaid."

³³³ Akhtar, "Pakistan." (p. 118)

conflicts prompted Iran to react and enforce policies encouraging Afghan refugees to repatriate.³³⁴ Next, Pakistan's aid flow fluctuated as the United States no longer donated the same funds to the UNHCR. By 2010-2015 the UNHCR aid significantly diminished towards Pakistan. Pakistan then reciprocated in kind and began to close its borders, revoked residency cards, and deported Afghans. As a result, front-line state response depended upon the support and funding western nations directed towards them; without financial backing, they reneged on their initial support of their Muslim neighbors.³³⁵

Ultimately, Chapter III connected the Afghan refugee crisis to the networks and global institutions most capable and responsible for addressing and alleviating Afghans' ongoing, cyclical displacement. The UNHCR, NGOs, and front-line states were one major part of the refugee system. However, the most influential and powerful entity that guided, supported, influenced, and structured the international refugee system were those donor states capable of providing the most monetary assistance. Therefore, Chapter III concluded with a critical and poignant assertion that the most powerful and financially involved state is the United States; based on the data present, it is also the most responsible for the Afghan refugee crisis. Both because the United States has had a long history of involvement with Afghan politics and because the United States invaded and remained in Afghanistan for two decades. The United States Operation Enduring Freedom contributed to hundreds of thousands of casualties and deaths. In response to heavy bombing and air strikes, the United States increased its donation to Afghanistan, generating a correlation between the destruction caused by their policies and the

³³⁴ Noor, "Afghan Refugees After 9/11," 2022. (p. 74)

³³⁵ Threlkeld, "Afghanistan-Pakistan Ties and Future Stability in Afghanistan | United States Institute of Peace."

level of financial support dispersed. Financial support did not translate to better conditions for Afghans, as heaving bombing years contributed to spikes in Afghan displacement.³³⁶

Chapter IV analyzed the United States as a case study, examined the U.S. as a powerful global refugee influencer, and critically evaluated its role in providing the 124,000 Afghan refugees flowed out of Afghanistan on August 30, 2021. This chapter assessed the most recent Afghan refugee exodus within the response of the United States as the most influential and involved state in Afghanistan; the withdrawal of U.S. forces after the Doha negotiations with the Taliban impressed upon the Afghan people a sense of betrayal.³³⁷ This statement has been repeated throughout the media, as refugees interviewed have stated their feelings, and Afghans contracted with the U.S. military have voiced their disappointment. Many, like my family, have come to evaluate the situation as a failure and a betrayal. After twenty years of heavy political, social, and monetary involvement, the United States promptly evacuated, leaving many with no option to seek asylum/refuge. Chapter IV drew on the data available from news sources recording the number of evacuees, international refugee networks documenting critical refugee issues, and the level of advocacy from the global community urging Afghan refugee assistance.

Chapter IV also evaluated the refugee system and the international community's response in aiding the United States with its crisis, as many refugees fled by boarding U.S. military planes. The U.S. urged its allies to support them in their moment of need, and when many states pledged to take in Afghan refugees, it was evident that the power of the U.S. can mobilize many nations to act. The U.S.'s influence is apparent within this recent Afghan refugee crisis, as the call for global assistance from the U.S. prompted swift actions by Germany, the U.K., Canada, Australia,

³³⁶ "The U.S. War in Afghanistan | Council on Foreign Relations." Bokati-Lindell, "Opinion | Did America Betray Afghanistan? - The New York Times."

³³⁷ Bokati-Lindell, "Opinion | Did America Betray Afghanistan? - The New York Times."

and other nations like Tajikistan. These states rushed to pledge to take Afghan refugees as a political maneuver that enhanced their position with the U.S.

Chapter IV further explored the complicated terrain of the U.S. immigration system and the country's refugee and asylum process in the context of contemporary policies. Conservative administrations' proposals and an immigration system designed to limit and deter asylum seekers revealed Afghan refugees' struggles in their attempt to gain asylum post-2021. However, while there was an immediate response, the aftermath of the 2021 U.S. withdrawal led to long wait times within the rigid U.S. immigration system severely minimized under the Trump Administration. The United States has historically accepted low levels of refugees compared to its economic and political capacity in context to other developed first-world nations such as Canada. As a result, the Trump administration is only one part of the problem since Biden's administration did not rectify his predecessor's budget and employee cuts. As a result, many Afghans are still waiting in camps in secondary countries and enduring extensive vetting processes for humanitarian parole, SIV, or P2.

While there are many avenues of relief, the United States is a significant driver of refugee policy because it is the largest donor of the UNHCR, the IRC, Refugees international, and other refugee agencies. The United States is the global superpower, the wealthiest nation, and has been the most involved country in Afghanistan's political and social development. The response of the United States to displaced Afghans internally and externally has been weak at best and purposely destructive at its worst. The U.S. can and should resolve the bottlenecks of Afghan refugee populations in front-line states, Qatar, Macedonia, Turkey, and beyond. The U.S. can hire and expand the role of USCIS and pass critical legislation like the Afghan Adjustment Act for Afghans struggling with only humanitarian parole status. Lastly, the U.S. can encourage and

advocate for European nations to increase their efforts in assisting, evacuating, and taking Afghan refugees in this unprecedented crisis. Suggestions of assistance are avenues of redemption for the United States after two decades of occupation, secret negotiations with the Taliban, and a prompt withdrawal that devastated the country's socio-economic conditions resulting in the unresolved 2021 Afghan refugee crisis.

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